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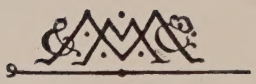
HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

# MILITARY OPERATIONS



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# GENERAL THEATRE OF OPERATIONS (WESTERN FRONT)

*The original German plan for the Campaign in the West is shown in Green.*

..... *Concentration.*

– – – *Line to be reached on 22nd day of Mobilization. (August 23).*

+ + + *Line to be reached on 31st day of Mobilization. (September 1).*

——→ *Further advance of Right Wing.*

*(From Lt.-Col. W. Foerster's Graf Schlieffen).*

*Ordnance Survey, 1920*

SKETCH 1.

# HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

BY DIRECTION OF THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

# MILITARY OPERATIONS

## FRANCE AND BELGIUM, 1914

MONS, THE RETREAT TO THE SEINE, THE MARNE AND THE AISNE
AUGUST—OCTOBER 1914

COMPILED BY

BRIGADIER-GENERAL J. E. EDMONDS

C.B., C.M.G., R.E. (Retired), p.s.c.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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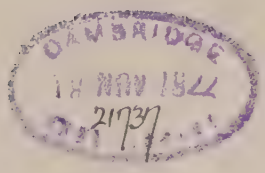
1922

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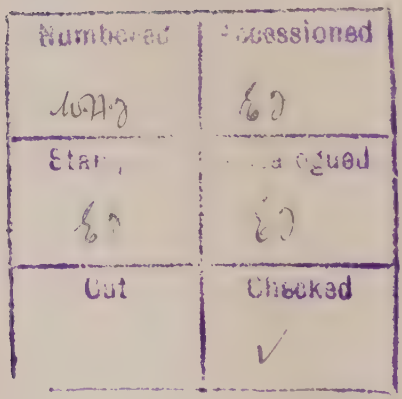


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# PREFACE

THIS history has been compiled with the purpose of providing within reasonable compass an authoritative account, suitable for general readers and for students at military schools, of the operations of the British Army in the Western theatre of war in 1914–1918. It is based on the British official records.

The present volume covers events from mobilization up to the middle of October 1914 only, a period of two and a half months, and is on a scale which to a large extent treats the battalion, squadron and battery records as the basis of the story. In succeeding volumes it will not be possible or desirable to adhere to this, and successively the brigade, division and even corps may become the unit of narrative. For this volume the scale adopted seems appropriate, in view of the importance of small units in the early operations, of the lessons to be derived from the study of the work of these units in open warfare, and of the desirability of leaving a picture of what war was like in 1914, when trained soldiers were still of greater importance than material, and gas, tanks, long-range guns, creeping barrages and the participation of aircraft in ground fighting were unknown.

The mass of documents to be dealt with was very great, and the difficulty has been not in obtaining information, but in compressing and cutting down what was available. The British records comprise not only the war diaries of every staff and unit engaged, with their voluminous appendices containing all orders, intelligence,

etc., received and issued, and detailed reports of actions, but they include also the General Headquarters files, the Commander-in-Chief's diary, and practically every telegram and message despatched and received. These official documents have been supplemented by private diaries and papers which have been kindly lent, by regimental records, and by interviews with officers who took part in the operations.

On a modern battlefield, however, knowledge of events is extraordinarily local, and the transmission of information difficult; in addition important witnesses only too often become casualties. Though written orders and messages are absolutely reliable evidence of the matters with which they deal, war diaries and reports of actions, written up immediately after events, are liable to contain mistakes. Commanders and staffs are naturally more concerned in finding out and reporting the exact situation and condition of their troops and of the enemy, in sending up reinforcements, ammunition and supplies, and recording experience for future use than in the collection of historical matter. In fact, even officers well known to be specially interested in military history have confessed that during the war the idea of collecting or keeping material for its future historian never occurred to them. Many incidents deserving of record may therefore have escaped notice. It will greatly assist in the compilation of monographs or of a fuller official history in years to come, if readers who can supply further information or corrections will communicate with the Secretary of the Historical Section, Committee of Imperial Defence, 2 Whitehall Gardens, London, S.W.1.

The text and maps now presented are the result of the co-operative labours of the staff, past and present, of the Historical Section, Military Branch,[1] which, in collaboration with the Disposal of Records Department, War Office, is also charged with the sorting and arrangement of the

[1] Special assistance in compiling this volume has been rendered by Major A. F. Becke, Major F. W. Tomlinson, Captain G. C. Wynne and Mr. E. A. Dixon.

records dealing with operations overseas. This latter part of its work absorbed most of its energy and time until well on into 1921. The Branch did not obtain a permanent home until October 1919; thus a large amount of important material did not become available until it was unpacked and sorted after this date, and it was then found necessary to re-write an account of the initial operations already partly drafted.

The British Expeditionary Force in France in 1914 was not acting independently, and formed only a small part of the Allied Armies engaged; it has therefore been necessary to include an account of the action of the French and Belgian forces sufficient to provide a proper framework for the British operations. As regards the Belgian Army, ample material for this purpose has been published by the Belgian General Staff. The French General Staff has not yet issued any history, but much information with regard to the French plans and operations has already been made public: officially in the reports of Parliamentary Enquiries, semi-officially by historians like M. Hanotaux, M. Engerand, M. Madelin and General Palat (*Pierre Lehautcourt*), and in the form of reminiscences and memoirs by actual participants, such as Generals Lanrezac, Galliéni, Dubail and Mangin. It was not, therefore, thought necessary to trouble the French General Staff except as regards the incident of the assistance rendered by General Sordet's Cavalry Corps at the battle of Le Cateau, when a copy of the war diary of the troops concerned was very courteously furnished. With this exception, it must be understood that for the French operations the only absolutely authoritative statements quoted are the orders, instructions, intelligence reports, etc., received officially by G.H.Q. from the French Grand Quartier Général.

The published German accounts of the early part of the war are very numerous, and they deal both with the decisions and orders of the higher commanders and the operations of many corps and even smaller fighting units. The most notable are the books of the three Army com-

manders, von Kluck, von Bülow and von Hausen, the General Staff monographs "Lüttich-Namur" and "Mons," the official list of battles and engagements, with the names of the formations, etc., present, entitled "Schlachten und Gefechte," and the stories of participants like General von Zwehl, General von Kuhl, Hauptmann Bloem (the novelist) and Hofprediger Vogel.[1] It was originally intended to give the accounts derived from German sources in the form of notes at the end of each Chapter; but, after consideration, it was decided that such an arrangement might prove inconvenient, and that it was better as a general rule to include them in the body of the Chapters, as close as possible to the events in the British narrative to which they refer. This arrangement, in view of the difference of the character of the material, has naturally caused breaks in the style and scope of the story, but it makes the comparison of the two accounts easier.

General Freiherr Mertz von Quirheim, the Director of the German *Reichsarchiv*, Berlin, which has custody of the war records, has been good enough to furnish material in order to clear up a few points on which there seemed insufficient information.

As separate histories of the Royal Air Force and the Medical Services are being compiled, a detailed account of their work has not been included in the narrative.

Two sets of maps have been prepared. The one, distinguished by the word "Sketches," sufficient for the general reader, is bound in the volume; the other, intended for the use of students of war, is issued separately. Except the situation maps for the battle of the Aisne, which are taken from the originals, the maps have been compiled from data and sketches in the war diaries or furnished by officers, or from French and German publications.

The typescript or proof sheets have been read by a number of commanders and staff and regimental officers who took part in the events narrated, and the compiler has been greatly assisted by their advice and criticism,

[1] See List of Books, pp. xxiii-xxvi.

for which he tenders them his most sincere thanks. He is specially grateful to Mr. C. T. Atkinson, his predecessor in charge of the Branch, for advice and help at all times, which his intimate knowledge of the records made most valuable; and both to him and to Mr. W. B. Wood, the partner in the compilation of a book on an earlier war, for the reading and correction of the proof sheets.

J. E. E.

*April* 1922.

# NOTES

THE locations of troops and places are given from right to left of the front of the Allied Forces, unless otherwise stated. Thus, even in the retreat to the Seine they are described from east to west. In translations of German orders they are left as in the original, but otherwise enemy troops are enumerated in relation to the British front.

The convention observed in the British Expeditionary Force is followed as regards the distinguishing numbers of Armies, Corps, Divisions, etc., of the British and Allied Armies, *e.g.*, they are written in full for Armies, but in Roman figures for Corps, and in Arabic for smaller formations and units, except Artillery Brigades, which are Roman; thus: Fourth Army, IV. Corps, 4th Division, 4th Infantry Brigade, 4th Cavalry Brigade, IV. Brigade, R.F.A.

German formations and units, to distinguish them clearly from the Allies, are printed in italic characters, thus: *First Army, I. Corps, 1st Division.*

The usual Army, and sometimes the Army List, abbreviations of regimental names have been used in the narrative; for example, "2/R. West Kent" or "West Kents" for 2nd Battalion The Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment); "the Somerset" or "Somerset L.I." for The Somerset Light Infantry; K.O.Y.L.I. for the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry; K.R.R.C. for The King's Royal Rifle Corps. To avoid constant repetition, the "Royal" in regimental titles is often omitted and, for instance, the Royal Warwickshire are called "the Warwickshire."

Abbreviations employed occasionally are:—

G.H.Q. for British General Headquarters.

G.Q.G. for French Grand Quartier Général (usually spoken as "Grand Q.G.").

O.H.L. for German *Oberste Heeresleitung* (German Supreme Command). *N.B.*—"G.H.Q." in German means Grosses Haupt-Quartier, that is the Kaiser's Headquarters, political, military and naval, as distinguished from O.H.L.

Officers are described by the rank which they held at the period under consideration.

The accents in French and Belgian place names well known to British troops have been omitted.

The meaning of *Reserve*, *Ersatz*, *Landwehr* as applied to German formations is explained on pp. 21, 22. Of other German terms used, *Jäger* and *Schützen* both signify riflemen formed in special battalions; *Abteilung* means a group of three batteries of artillery; a German artillery brigade consists of two regiments each of two or three *Abteilungen*.[1]

*Pioniere*: are the German field Engineers; the word cannot well be translated by "Engineers" or "Pioneers," as the men in the *Pioniere* units, although they have a thorough training in field engineering, are not tradesmen of the class found in R.E. Companies, and are only employed on field duties; besides, in Germany there was an "Ingenieur Korps," which had duties in the construction and maintenance of fortresses.

Time in German narratives and orders, which in the period dealt with was one hour earlier than British, has been corrected to our standard, unless it has specifically stated against it "German time."

[1] *Abteilung* also means a mounted machine-gun battery with cavalry, as opposed to the *M.G. Kompagnie*, which forms part of an infantry regiment or *Jäger* battalion.

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# LIST OF BOOKS

## TO WHICH MOST FREQUENT REFERENCE IS MADE

BAUMGARTEN-CRUSIUS : "Die Marneschlacht 1914." By Generalmajor Baumgarten-Crusius. (Leipzig : Lippold, 5 marks.)

An account of the battle of the Marne and the events leading to it, founded on official records. It is written particularly from the point of view of the German *Third Army* by a Saxon general. This was the first German book which told the truth about the Marne.

BAUMGARTEN-CRUSIUS II. : "Deutsche Heerführung im Marnefeldzug 1914." By Generalmajor Baumgarten-Crusius. (Berlin : Scherl, 31 marks.)

A further contribution to the solution of the question of responsibility for the orders to retreat at the battle of the Marne.

BELGIAN GENERAL STAFF : "Military Operations of Belgium in Defence of the Country and to Uphold her Neutrality." (English translation : London, Collingridge, 1s. net.)

Report, compiled by the Belgian General Staff, for the period July 31st to December 31st, 1914.

BLOEM : "Vormarsch." By Walter Bloem. (Leipzig : Grethlein, 6 marks.)

One of the most graphic and dramatic accounts of war yet written. The author is a well-known German novelist, who was serving, as a Reserve Captain, in the *12th Brandenburg Grenadiers* (*III. Corps* of von Kluck's Army). He gives the story of his experiences from outbreak of war to the Aisne, where he was wounded on Chivres Spur.

BRANDIS : "Die Stürmer von Douaumont." By Oberleutnant von Brandis. (Berlin : Scherl, 2 marks.)

The author served in the *24th Regiment* of the *III. Corps* at Mons, Frameries, etc. He later took part in the capture of Fort Douaumont, Verdun ; this incident is commemorated in the title of his book.

BÜLOW : "Mein Bericht zur Marneschlacht." By Generalfeldmarschall von Bülow. (Berlin : Scherl, 9·60 marks.) (Translated into French as "Mon rapport sur la bataille de la Marne.") (Paris : Payot, 6 francs.)

A clear military narrative, with sketch maps, by the commander of the German *Second Army*, which includes the battle of the Aisne 1914.

" Deutsche Kavallerie " : " Die Deutsche Kavallerie in Belgien und Frankreich 1914." By Generalleutnant von Poseck. (Berlin : Mittler, 60 marks.)

The author was Chief of the Staff of the *I. Cavalry Corps*, and is now Inspector of Cavalry. It is a very valuable summary of the cavalry operations, based on the official records.

ENGERAND : " La Bataille de la Frontière (Août 1914)." By Fernand Engerand, *Député*. (Paris : Bossard, 7·50 francs.)

The author was " rapporteur " of the Parliamentary Commission which inquired into the loss of the Briey Basin. He gives a summary of the report, with important documents as appendices.

FALKENHAYN : " General Headquarters 1914–1916 and its Critical Decisions." By General Erich von Falkenhayn. (English translation, Hutchinson & Co., 21s.)

Von Falkenhayn was Prussian Minister of War in 1914 ; but on 14th September he took over the duties of Chief of the General Staff from von Moltke. The book deals mostly with the successes of the Russian theatre of war, but contains much of importance as regards decisions in the West.

GALLIÉNI : " Mémoires du Général Galliéni. Défense de Paris." (Paris : Payot, 16 francs.)

A most valuable record. With Situation Maps.

HANOTAUX : " Histoire illustrée de la Guerre de 1914." By M. Gabriel Hanotaux. Nine volumes published. (Paris : Gounouilhou, 25 francs per volume.)

A beautifully illustrated work containing a large number of official documents, which make it valuable. The ninth volume carries the narrative to the 6th September 1914.

HAUSEN : " Erinnerungen an der Marnefeldzug 1914." By Generaloberst Freiherr von Hausen. (Leipzig : Koehler, 24 marks.) (A French translation has been announced.)

A personal and historical account of the campaign up to the end of the battle of the Marne by the commander of the German *Third Army*, with numerous sketch maps and an order of battle of the German forces.

HEUBNER : " Unter Emmich vor Lüttich. Unter Kluck vor Paris." By H. Heubner, Hauptmann der Reserve und Professor in Wernigerode. (Schwerin : Bahn, 5 marks.)

A very vivid account by a professor and Reserve captain, which ends at the Aisne 1914. He belonged to the *20th Infantry Regiment, 11th Infantry Brigade, 6th Division, III. Corps* of von Kluck's Army and was at Mons, the Ourcq, etc.

KLUCK : " Der Marsch auf Paris, und die Marneschlacht 1914." By A. von Kluck, Generaloberst. (Berlin : Mittler, 27 marks.) (Translated as " The March on Paris 1914." Edward Arnold, 10s.)

Von Kluck's own statement, with a very fine map showing the movements of the German *First Army*.

KUHL: "Der deutsche Generalstab in Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Weltkrieges." By General der Infanterie H. von Kuhl. (Berlin: Mittler, 27 marks.)

An account of the work of the Great General Staff in preparation for and during the war, specially valuable for the part dealing with the development of the German plan of campaign. The author was the Chief of the Staff to von Kluck and Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, and had served 22 years on the Great General Staff before the war.

KUHL'S "Marne": "Der Marnefeldzug 1914." By General der Infanterie H. von Kuhl. (Berlin: Mittler, 48 marks.)

Published January 1921. Regarded by the German Press as the last word on the battle of the Marne until the official account appears.

LOHRISCH: "Im Siegessturm von Lüttich an die Marne." By Oberleutnant der Reserve Dr. H. Lohrisch. (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 5 marks.)

The author served in the *27th Infantry Regiment* of the *IV. Corps* in the early fighting, including Le Cateau.

"Lüttich-Namur": "Der grosse Krieg in Einzeldarstellungen. Herausgegeben im Auftrage des grossen Generalstabes." (Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling, 2·40 marks + war percentage.)

In the series of Great General Staff monographs. A very complete account of the capture of Liége and Namur.

"Mons": "Die Schlacht bei Mons."

In the same series as "Lüttich-Namur." There are excellent maps showing the German dispositions.

M.W.B.: Militär Wochenblatt.

PALAT: "La grande guerre sur le front occidental." By General Palat. Seven volumes published. (Paris: Chapelot, 12 francs each.)

A valuable unofficial compilation, as regards the movements of the French. The seventh volume carries the story of the war on the Western Front to end of the "Race to the Sea," 1914. The maps are portions of the 1 : 80,000 with no troops marked on them.

"Schlachten und Gefechte": "Die Schlachten und Gefechte des Grossen Krieges, 1914–1918. Quellenwerk nach amtlichen Bezeichnungen zusammengestellt vom Grossen Generalstab." (Berlin: Sack, 42 marks.)

An official list of battles compiled by the Great General Staff showing the formations, etc., engaged in each, and lists of the higher commanders, with excellent index.

STEGEMANN: "Geschichte des Krieges." Vols. I. II. and III. By H. Stegemann, a Swiss journalist. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Vertags-Anstalt, 24 marks each.)

A good general account of the war from the German point of view.

TAPPEN : " Bis zur Marne." By Generalleutnant Tappen. (Oldenburg : Stalling, 3 marks.)

The author was head of the Operations Section of Supreme Headquarters until August 1916. His book gives considerable insight into the opening operations up to and including the Marne, but has led to a good deal of controversy in Germany.

VOGEL : "3,000 Kilometer mit der Garde-Kavallerie." By Hofprediger Dr. Vogel. (Leipzig : Velhagen und Klassing, 5 marks.)

This is practically a picturesque diary of the operations of the *Guard Cavalry Division* from outbreak of war to May 1915, written by the Divisional Chaplain.

WIRTH : " Von Saale zur Aisne." By Hauptmann der Landwehr A. Wirth. (Leipzig : Hesse & Becker, 5 marks.)

A small diary by an orderly officer attached to the Staff of the *13th Reserve Division* (*IV. Reserve Corps*) that fought at Le Cateau, etc.

" Ypres " : " Ypres 1914 " (Constable : 5s.), translation of " Die Schlacht an der Yser und bei Ypern im Herbst 1914." (In the same series as " Lüttich-Namur.")

Contains, besides an account of the First Ypres, a good many details of the organization of the German Army.

ZWEHL : " Maubeuge, Aisne, Verdun." By General der Infanterie von Zwehl. (Berlin : Curtius, 72 marks.)

The author commanded the *VII. Reserve Corps*, captured Maubeuge, and reached the Chemin des Dames ridge at the Aisne just in time to prevent the British I. Corps from seizing it. There is a good account of the battle and much else of interest in the book.

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE ARMIES OF THE WESTERN ALLIED POWERS

### GREAT BRITAIN

The year 1871, which witnessed the foundation of the German Empire, marked also an epoch in the history of the British Army. In that year the first steps were taken to replace the old army of Peninsular model by a force raised and organized on modern lines: the system of purchase, under which officers bought their commissions in each successive rank, was abolished; short service was adopted,[1] not so much with the idea of attracting recruits as of building up a reserve; and regiments of infantry, except those which were already composed of more than one battalion, were grouped in pairs. Ten years later, in 1881, this grouping was made permanent, the old numbers were abolished and the infantry was reconstituted into double-battalion regiments with territorial titles on a territorial basis.[2]

The old Militia remained, as always, on a territorial basis. It was gradually drifting back to the function, which it had fulfilled during the Napoleonic wars, of a recruiting depot for the army, but without the ballot; for the enforcement of the ballot had for a long time been suspended by an annual Act of Parliament.[3]

[1] It had already been tried in Marlborough's time and in the Napoleonic wars, and had been the rule with the European regiments of the East India Company's Service.

[2] An excellent account of the development of the Army will be found in "The Army Book of the British Empire" (H.M. Stationery Office, 5s.). It unfortunately stops at 1893.

[3] The ballot had been systematically employed almost all through the Napoleonic wars. There were two kinds of Militia:—the Regular, which was permanently embodied in war time and provided a home-defence force; and the Local, which, apart from annual training, was only to be called out in case of actual invasion and rebellion, so that it was practically a training reserve.

Side by side with the Militia stood the Yeomanry Cavalry, first called into being by the threat of a French invasion in 1794–95. It attracted an excellent class of recruit, but its training was very limited, both in scope and duration.

Behind the Militia and Yeomanry were the Volunteers, chiefly infantry. They also had been first formed in 1794–95; but in 1806–7 they had been transformed into Local Militia, recruited by ballot without power of substitution, and subject to the same discipline as the Militia. After 1815 the Local Militia soon died out; but in 1859 the Volunteers were revived on the original basis of 1794–95.

The best part of a generation, however, was needed for the new army system, initiated in 1871, to settle down and bear fruit. The home battalion of a regiment was for years little more than a group of boys who, as they matured, were drafted out to the battalion on foreign service. Only in India was the real British Army of fully-trained and grown men to be seen.

In 1899–1902 the war in South Africa put the British military forces to a rude practical test. Never before had so many troops been sent overseas. The Regular Army was found to be too small for the work even when the Reserves had been called out, and means to supplement it had to be improvised; the Militia and Yeomanry volunteered for foreign service almost to a man; the Volunteer battalions sent a succession of companies to the Regular battalions of their regiments in South Africa, and formed special active service units; and the Overseas Dominions and Colonies enthusiastically raised and despatched contingents. The experience acquired by all arms and by all branches of the Staff in this war was soon to prove of the utmost value.

In February 1904 the office of Commander-in-Chief was abolished, and with it the system which had been built up by the Duke of York between 1795–1809. After his death in 1827 the Secretary of State, representing the Government, had gradually indeed acquired most of the powers of the Commander-in-Chief, until few of them were left. An Army Council was set up, which gave the Secretary of State a board of six advisers: four professional soldiers, each of them at the head of a great department, and two civilians, known as the financial and civil members. The duties of the Commander-in-Chief as regards inspection of

troops were transferred to an Inspector-General of the Forces.

Next came the constitution of a General Staff, on principles which were decided at a meeting of the Army Council on 9th August 1905. The Chief of the General Staff was authorized to proceed with its formation on 11th November 1905. Instructions for its organization were promulgated by a special Army Order of 12th September 1906. Such a body was a complete innovation in the British Army. The word "Staff" had been known for generations, but signified originally no more than the Department of the Commander-in-Chief as contrasted with that of the Secretary of State for War—of the Horse Guards as distinguished from the War Office. This Staff, however, was an administrative one only; there was no such thing as a Staff at Headquarters charged with such duties as are now associated with the name. Nor was the Headquarters Staff at the Horse Guards consulted as to military plans and operations. Its business was to provide such trained men as the Cabinet required, not to advise as to their duties or employment.

The General Staff came into being under the guidance of Mr. (now Lord) Haldane, who became Secretary of State for War in December 1905, and was charged with the duty of reorganizing the land forces not only of the country, but of the Empire.

The need of reform was urgent, for the Germans made little concealment of their intention to enter the lists for the domination of the world, and were not only perfecting vast military preparations, but quietly insinuating themselves into the control of the most important financial and commercial undertakings of their neighbours. They had already established an elaborate system of espionage, and were abusing the hospitality of friendly States by organizing also a system of sabotage—that is to say, the destruction, by secret agents introduced in time of peace, of such important means of communication as telegraph lines, railway junctions and bridges, and the like. Hitherto our ancient and glorious rival had been France; but this new enemy lay to the east and not to the south; and the eyes of those charged with the defence of the United Kingdom were now turned towards the North Sea instead of towards the Channel.

In order to fulfil our treaty obligations in respect of Belgium, there was now also a prospect that it might

become necessary to land a force on the continent of Europe: to protect the integrity of Belgium, and to operate in conjunction with the French and Belgian armies in case of a German attack on France which involved the violation of Belgian neutrality. Britain had always depended hitherto upon a nominally voluntary army for service abroad; but the numbers that could thus be raised were unlikely to be sufficient in an European war on a modern scale; and to combine a voluntary with a compulsory system of recruiting at short notice seemed impracticable, even if Parliament could have been brought to assent to it.

The problem presented to Mr. Haldane, therefore, was how to reorganize the existing forces so as to raise them to the highest point of efficiency, and to provide for their rapid expansion in time of need.

## The Reorganization of 1908

### *The Staff*

The first step was to build up a General Staff which should be the brains of the army; and special care was taken to separate its work, as a department concerned with strategy and training, from that of the old Headquarters Staff, whose duties were purely administrative. The instruction for officers of all branches of the Staff was provided at the Staff College, Camberley, which was greatly enlarged, and at the Indian Staff College at Quetta, recently founded by Lord Kitchener. From the graduates of these institutions officers for the General Staff and for the Adjutant-General's and Quartermaster-General's Departments were chosen. For the technical instruction of the Administrative Staff special arrangements were made at the London School of Economics for selected officers, including Staff College graduates, to be trained in such matters as business management and railway organization.

### *Officers*

The initial difficulty of providing a reserve of officers was very great. Mr. Haldane turned to the universities to supplement the military colleges at Sandhurst and Woolwich by converting the Volunteer Corps which had long existed in our older universities into Officers' Training

Corps;[1] and in these, under the guidance of the General Staff and with the concurrence of the university authorities, practical military instruction was given not only to army candidates but to many members who did not intend entering the military profession as a career. Public schools which possessed Volunteer Corps were invited to convert them into Contingents of the Officers' Training Corps; whilst universities and schools which had not got them were encouraged to form them, and those that did so were given the privilege of nominating a certain number of boys for admission to Sandhurst without further examination.

### *The Regular Army*

The great want of the mounted branches was a reserve of horses to make good the deficiencies on mobilization. This was supplied by taking a census of all horses in the kingdom, and obtaining statutory power to requisition all that were suitable for military purposes.

In the Artillery there was an insufficiency of ammunition columns to meet the increased expenditure of ammunition due to the introduction of quick-firing guns. The Garrison Artillery Militia was therefore turned into a Special Reserve, to be used primarily in the formation of these columns; and thirty-three regular batteries, which had their full complement of guns but few men, were employed to train them. The general reserve of artillery was, by careful nursing, increased. By 1912 the number of batteries that could be mobilized for war had been increased from forty-two to eighty-one. The field artillery was organized into brigades, each of three batteries and an ammunition column.

In the Infantry steps were taken to restore the observance of the system, generally called Lord Cardwell's, that for every battalion abroad at least one should be at home. The balance had been upset as a consequence of the South African War and our rapid Imperial expansion. By the withdrawal of certain colonial garrisons, the proportion was eventually established at eighty-four battalions at home—including nine of Guards that did not come into the Cardwell system—and seventy-three abroad.

[1] The idea of turning the University Volunteers into an Officers' Training Corps was suggested by Lord Lovat and others just after the conclusion of the South African war, but was not then taken up by the authorities.

The Army Service Corps, reorganized in 1888, had proved itself so efficient in South Africa that it needed little more than such changes in organization as were entailed by the introduction of motor transport. In 1900 the War Office had appointed a Mechanical Transport Committee; and by 1911 two schemes were in operation, viz. (*a*) the Provisional Subsidy Scheme, by which civil vehicles could be requisitioned for military purposes, until through (*b*) the Main Subsidy Scheme the number of vehicles built to the War Office specifications for private owners should suffice to supply the needs of the Army. Both schemes were employed to furnish the necessary vehicles on mobilization in 1914. In 1912 the transport of the divisions and the cavalry was reorganized. The horsed baggage and supply wagons were grouped into Train companies, leaving only first line or fighting transport with regimental units. For each division there was formed a divisional supply column of motor lorries, whose business it was to bring up rations to a point where the supply sections of the divisional Train could refill, and, if possible, to take back sick and wounded.

In the Medical Services of the Army many important changes were made in organization, training and administration.[1] They were due not only to the experience gained in the South African War, but to the lessons learnt from the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, and to the revision of the Geneva Convention in 1906, which afforded a new basis for the organization of voluntary aid. In the place of the bearer companies and field hospitals each division and the cavalry division were provided with self-contained field ambulances, and a new echelon—the clearing hospital—was introduced to facilitate the rapid evacuation of wounded, which was to be the great feature of the new system. Motor transport, though proposed in 1908, was only introduced on a very meagre scale, sufficient for peace purposes. The Army Nursing Service was put on a firm basis. Under the auspices of an Army Medical Board, of which eminent civilian specialists were members, sanitation, measures for prevention of disease, inoculation, and the provision of pure water, received special attention. To keep the medical service in touch with the General Staff, officers of the Royal Army Medical Corps were appointed to special

[1] They will be found described in detail in "History of the Great War, Medical Services, General History," and are therefore enumerated very briefly here.

sections of the Directorates of Military Operations and Military Training. The medical service of the Territorial Force was organized similarly to that of the Regular Army, and large provision made for the formation of hospitals in time of war and the organization of voluntary aid.

The Militia was renamed Special Reserve, to indicate what it had long been in practice—a depot for feeding the Regular Army. This was a reversion to the policy of Castlereagh, who had also turned the Old Militia (as it was called) into a recruit depot. This Old Militia consisted almost entirely of substitutes hired to take the place of balloted men, who when they had thus joined were offered a bounty to enlist in the Line and refill the ranks of Wellington's army in the Peninsula.

### *The Expeditionary Force*

The Regular Army, or First Line, was reorganized into an expeditionary force consisting of six divisions of all arms and one cavalry division. Each of the six divisions comprised three infantry brigades, or twelve battalions altogether, with divisional mounted troops, artillery, engineers, signal service, supply and transport train, and field ambulances. The total war establishment of each division was thus raised to some 18,000 of all ranks and descriptions, of whom 12,000 were infantry, with 24 machine guns, and 4,000 artillery, with seventy-six guns (fifty-four 18-pdrs.; eighteen 4·5-inch howitzers; and four 60-pdrs.). The Cavalry Division comprised four brigades of three regiments each, and cavalry divisional troops, consisting of artillery, engineers, signal service and medical units. The strength was some 9000 of all ranks and 10,000 horses, with twenty guns (13-pdrs.) and twenty-four machine guns. Although the nucleus of one corps staff was maintained in time of peace, at Aldershot, and corps had been formed at manœuvres, it was not originally intended to have any intermediate echelon between the General Headquarters of the Expeditionary Force and the six divisions. The decision to form corps was—in order to conform to French organization—made immediately on the formal appointment on mobilization of Field-Marshal Sir John French as Commander-in-Chief. Thus it happened that two out of the three corps staffs had to be improvised; and even in the divisional staffs the Peace Establishment allowed for

only two out of the six officers given in the War Establishment. None the less, this new organization was a great step forward in the preparation of the army for war.

### *The Second Line*

The Yeomanry became the second line of cavalry, and was reorganized into fourteen brigades.

The Volunteers were treated according to the precedent of Castlereagh, who had invited them to convert themselves into Local Militia, on pain of disbandment. So, too, Mr. Haldane bade them either become Territorial troops or cease to exist. Mr. Haldane further reverted to the old policy of decentralization, and entrusted the raising and administration of the Territorial Force to the County Lieutenancies, renamed Territorial Associations, under the Presidency of the Lords Lieutenant. The only difference between the two statesmen was that Castlereagh insisted upon compulsory personal service, under the ballot, for the Local Militia, whereas Mr. Haldane did not—or rather, in the prevailing temper of Parliament, could not—do the same for the Territorial Force. This force, whose establishment was something over 300,000 strong, was organized upon exactly the same lines as the Regular Army. Its units were grouped into fourteen divisions, commanded by major-generals of the Regular Army with small Regular staffs.

The old Militia Garrison Artillery was replaced by Territorial Coast Artillery. The field artillery of Territorial divisions was armed with 15-pounder guns converted into quick-firers, and 5-inch howitzers used in the South African War; its heavy artillery consisted of 4·7-inch guns.

So much for the reorganization of the Territorial Forces on paper. Unfortunately, before 1914, both Special Reserve and Territorial troops sank so far below their establishment as to cause some anxiety at headquarters; but it was not doubted that many old Territorials would rejoin the force at the approach of danger; and this confidence proved to be well justified. It is true that it was not anticipated that the Territorials would be ready for the field in less than six months; but they had had at least some training; and, since their organization was identical with that of the First Line, they could be employed to reinforce the Regular Army, either by units or by complete divisions, as they became ready.

It had been Mr. Haldane's intention to make the County Associations the medium for indefinite expansion of the forces in case of need. The rough plans for such expansion were actually blocked out, some of the Associations possessing, in whole or in part, the machinery for carrying the plan into effect. But the scheme had not yet received statutory sanction, and had not even been worked out in detail. Meanwhile, the County Associations justified Mr. Haldane's faith in them, and their zeal and ability were of the utmost value to the War Office and the country.

### *Training*

The first textbook issued after the South African War for the instruction of the army was "Combined Training," dated 1902, written by the late Colonel G. F. R. Henderson. This, in 1905, became Part I. of "Field Service Regulations." In 1909 the book was superseded by the issue of "Field Service Regulations—Part I. (Operations)," and "Part II. (Organization and Administration)" was published for the first time. These manuals dealt with the general principles governing the employment of the army in war.

Individual training—that is, the physical training, including route marching, bayonet fighting, musketry, signalling, scouting, and generally the education of the individual in his duties and the use of his arms—was carried on during the winter; this gave place in the spring to the training by units, first of squadrons, companies and batteries, next of cavalry regiments, infantry battalions and artillery brigades; next of cavalry and infantry brigades, first alone and then in conjunction with other arms; and next of divisions; the whole culminating in inter-divisional exercises and army manœuvres.

The great feature of the training for the attack and counter-attack was combination of fire and movement. Ground was gained as the enemy was approached by rushes of portions of a battalion, company or platoon, under cover of the fire of the remainder and of the artillery. By this procedure, a strong firing line was built up some 200 yards from the enemy; when fire superiority had been attained an assault was delivered. An attacking force was divided into firing line and supports, with local reserves, and the advance was often made in parallel lines in extended order; but the form was essentially elastic and adapted to the

ground, with the definite objects of maintaining control, utilizing such cover as was available, and presenting as difficult a target as possible to the enemy.[1]

Mobilization was regularly practised. Every winter certain units were brought up to war establishment in the prescribed manner, the reservists and horses required to complete them being represented by men and animals from other units. In 1910 one of the two Aldershot divisions was mobilized at the expense of the other and by volunteers from the 1st Class Army Reserve, and so was able to take part in the manœuvres at war numbers. Not only fighting units, but also such branches as the Ordnance and the Postal Service were represented at manœuvres, and their work was carried on under conditions approximating to those of active service.

All these reforms were pushed forward under the inevitable disadvantages which have ever hampered the British Army. Recruits were dribbling in at all times of the year. Trained instructors were being withdrawn for attachment to the auxiliary forces, and drafts of trained men were constantly leaving their battalions during the autumn and winter for India. The commanders, again, could never tell whether their next campaign might not be fought in the snows of the Himalayas, the swamps and bush of Africa or the deserts of Egypt—a campaign in Europe hardly entered into their calculations. It was practically impossible for the General Staff to keep abreast of the detailed information required as to possible theatres of war. Nevertheless, British regimental officers, to use their own expression, " carried on," although confronted with two changes uncongenial to many of the older men among them: the cavalry was trained to an increasing extent in the work of mounted infantry, and was armed with a rifle instead of a carbine; and the Regular infantry battalions were organized into four companies instead of eight.

In every respect the Expeditionary Force of 1914 was incomparably the best trained, best organized, and best

[1] The soundness of the principle of the combination of fire and movement was abundantly proved during the war; but, as experience was gained, it was found that there was no rôle for " supports " of the kind laid down in the pre-war manuals; reinforcing a line already stopped by casualties merely meant increasing losses without corresponding gain; and it became apparent that the proper employment of " local reserves " was to exploit local successes, and to fill defensively gaps in an attacking line that had been brought to a standstill.

equipped British Army that ever went forth to war.[1] Except in the matter of co-operation between aeroplanes and artillery, and use of machine guns, its training would stand comparison in all respects with that of the Germans.[2] Where it fell short of our enemies was first and foremost in numbers; so that, though not "contemptible," it was almost negligible in comparison with continental armies even of the smaller States.[3] In heavy guns and howitzers, high-explosive shell, trench mortars, hand-grenades,[4] and much of the subsidiary material required for siege and trench warfare, it was almost wholly deficient. Further, no steps had been taken to instruct the army in a knowledge of the probable theatre of war or of the German army, except by the publication of a handbook of the army and of annual reports on manœuvres and military changes. Exactly the same, however, was done in the case of the armies of all foreign States. The study of German military organization and methods was specifically forbidden at war games, staff tours, and intelligence classes, which would have provided the best opportunities for such instruction.

### *The National Reserve*

The last of the preparations for defence that requires mention here is the formation of the National Reserve, initiated by private enterprise in August 1910 with the approval of the Secretary of State for War and the Army Council. Its object was to register and organize all officers

[1] For the Order of Battle and organization of the British Expeditionary Force, see Appendices 1 and 2.

[2] The German General Staff in 1912 considered it an "ebenbürtiger Gegner"—man for man as good as their own. (Von Kuhl, "Der deutsche Generalstab," p. 87.)

[3] The following, which is translated from the German Admiralty Staff's "Der Krieg zur See 1914–1918: Nordsee," Bd. i. p. 82, is of interest in this connection:

"The Supreme Command made no demands whatever on the Navy to stop or delay the British transports. On the contrary, it seemed not to place much value on the action of the efficient (*wertvoll*) but numerically weak Expeditionary Corps. In any case, when at the beginning of the war Frigate-Captain Heydel of the Operations Section was sent by the Admiralty to inquire if the Army laid stress on the interruption of the transport of troops, the Chief of the General Staff personally replied that the Navy should not allow the operations that it would otherwise carry out to be interfered with on this account; it would even be of advantage if the Armies in the West could settle with the 160,000 English at the same time as the French and Belgians. His point of view was shared by many during the favourable commencement of the offensive in the West."

[4] There was a service hand-grenade, but it was a complicated one, with a long shaft, that proved unsuitable in trench warfare; it cost £1 : 1 : 3.

and men who had served in and left any of the military or naval forces of the Crown, with a view to increasing the military strength of the country in the event of imminent national danger. The National Reserve was divided into two classes:[1] one to reinforce existing units of the Regular Army, and the other to fill up vacancies in the Territorial Force, to strengthen garrisons, guard vulnerable points, or perform any other necessary military duties either as specialists or fighting men. By 1914, the National Reserve numbered about 350,000. On mobilization many of the members rejoined military and naval service; the remainder formed eventually the nucleus of the Royal Defence Corps.

### *Imperial Military Forces*

In 1907 there was a conference of Dominion Premiers in London, and the opportunity was seized to make the General Staff an Imperial one. Britain offered to train officers of the Overseas Dominions at the Staff Colleges, and to send out staff officers of her own as servants of the Dominion Governments. It was urged that there should be in all the forces of the Empire uniformity of armament and organization. The Dominions cordially welcomed these proposals. The Imperial General Staff was formed and unity of organization was established. The Dominions reserved to themselves the right of deciding whether to participate with their forces in the event of hostilities outside their own territories.

### *The Indian Forces*

In India, the reorganization of the army on modern lines into nine divisions, six cavalry brigades and a certain number of independent brigades by Lord Kitchener in 1903, was designed to meet the Russian menace and make India independent of assistance from overseas for twelve months. As a consequence of the Anglo-Russian Agreement in 1907, and the state of Indian finances, this reorganization was never completed. The "Army in India Committee" of 1912–13 recommended that the field army should consist of seven divisions, five cavalry brigades and certain army troops, a force sufficient to deal with Afghanistan and the mountain tribes combined, till rein-

[1] See "National Reserve Regulations," issued with Special Army Order, March 7, 1913.

forcements could arrive. This was the authorized Field Army when war broke out in 1914, but even this had not been provided with all its mobilization equipment. No troops were maintained for the specific purpose of war outside the Indian sphere. Not till August 1913 was the Government of India invited to consider the extent to which India would be prepared to co-operate with the Imperial Forces in the event of a serious war between Britain and an European enemy. It was agreed that the Army Council might count upon two—possibly three—divisions and one cavalry brigade. Actually in 1914, as will be seen, two infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions were sent to France, a division to the Persian Gulf, the equivalent of the infantry of two divisions to Egypt, besides minor detachments, and all but eight battalions of British infantry were withdrawn from India, their places being filled by British Territorial troops. But no measures were taken to make India the Eastern military base of the British Empire by the provision of arsenals and the development of the industrial resources of the country for war purposes, except in certain minor items.[1]

### *The Committee of Imperial Defence*

The supreme direction of war in England, which originally lay in the sovereign, and was actually exercised by William III., passed after that monarch's death to the principal Ministers, and has remained with the Cabinet, or a group within the Cabinet, ever since. Up to 1904, no precedent had ever been set for the formation of a Council of War or of any standing advisory body for the Cabinet in naval and military matters in view of the outbreak of war.

In 1895, however, a Defence Committee of the Cabinet was formed which, after some changes in 1902, was finally turned by Mr. Balfour in 1904 into the Committee of Imperial Defence. It was then placed under the direct control of the Prime Minister; and a Secretariat was provided to record its deliberations and decisions, to collect information, to outline plans necessary to meet certain contingencies, and to ensure continuity of policy.

Much good work was done by the Committee in various

[1] Field artillery ammunition and rifles in small quantities, small-arm ammunition, certain vehicles, boots, saddles, harness.

directions. Full measures were thought out in 1909 for counteracting any hostile system of espionage and sabotage, the Official Secrets Act being amended in 1911 to give the Government greater powers. An amendment of the Army Act in 1909 also gave authority to billet troops in time of emergency. Lastly, the essential steps to be taken immediately upon the outbreak of war were all of them studied exhaustively, and the distribution of the consequent duties among the various departments, and among even individual officials, was arranged in the minutest detail, so that there should be no delay and no confusion. The results of these preparations, and the regulations finally laid down, were embodied in a "War-book," and all essential documents were prepared beforehand, so that they might be signed instantly, the very room in which the signature should take place being fixed, and a plan showing its exact position attached to the documents.

Altogether, Britain never yet entered upon any war with anything approaching such forwardness and forethought in the preparation of the scanty military resources at the disposal of the War Office. The Committee of Imperial Defence was still, however, only an advisory body without administrative or executive functions.

From 1911 onward the French and British Staffs had worked out in detail a scheme for the landing of the Expeditionary Force in France, and for its concentration in the area Maubeuge—Le Cateau—Hirson, but, though there was an "obligation of honour," there was no definite undertaking to send the whole or any part of this force to any particular point, or, in fact, anywhere at all.

## FRANCE

(See Sketch 1; Maps 1 & 2)

For France the problem of defence against her eastern neighbour was a very difficult one. The frontier had no natural protection, and the population of France was not only smaller than Germany's, but steadily sinking lower in comparison. She first sought to assist the solution of the problem by creating great fortified regions along her borders, alternating with selected gaps. Thus, from the Swiss frontier to Epinal there were roughly forty miles of fortification; from Epinal to Toul a space of forty miles

—the well-known Trouée de Charmes—was left undefended; from Toul to Verdun was another forty miles of fortification; and from Verdun to the Belgian frontier another gap of thirty miles. In second line were the second-class fortresses of Besançon, Dijon, Langres, Rheims, and Laon; and in rear of them again the entrenched camps of Lyons and Paris. There were no modern fortifications on the Franco-Belgian frontier, but La Fère, Maubeuge, and Lille were defended by old-fashioned detached forts.

The steadily aggressive attitude of Germany justified the uneasiness of France. In 1887 Germany formed a Triple Alliance with Austria and Italy. In 1890 France responded by an Alliance with Russia. In 1891 Germany emphasized her hostile bearing by renewing the Triple Alliance; and in 1899 she rejected the Tsar's proposal for a limitation of armaments. In 1905, 1911, and 1912 she made important additions to her army, raising its strength to twenty-five active corps, as against the fifteen with which she had taken the field in 1870; and behind these twenty-five she had nearly an equal number of Reserve corps.[1] On 30th June 1913 the total number of men with the colours in peace was raised from 711,000 to 856,000;[2] this not only made the army the readier for an *attaque brusquée*, so much dreaded by the French, but assured a substantial corresponding increase in the effectives of reserve formations.

France could only reply by reimposing the term of three years with the colours, which in 1905 she had reduced to two years. This signified an augmentation of 220,000 men to her peace strength. But, even so, France had at the outbreak of war, roughly speaking, only three millions and a half of trained men, whereas Germany had over four millions;[3] and, moreover, Germany's Reserve formations were more completely organized than those of the French.

The French Army in peace was composed of ten cavalry divisions; twenty-one army corps, each corps area also

[1] On 2nd August 1914 Germany mobilized 14 Reserve corps, 4 Reserve divisions and 3 Reserve brigades; on 16th August the formation of 6 new Reserve corps and 1 new Reserve division was ordered.

[2] See p. 21.

[3] The figure given since the war by various German authorities is 3,891,000. They attempt to show France had more by including the coloured troops in her colonies, but even with these the total French mobilizable strength was only 3,683,000 (Pédoya's "Commission de l'Armée," p. 203, etc.).

furnishing in war a Reserve division [1] and certain Territorial brigades; and a Colonial Corps.

On mobilization, according to the plan in force in 1914,[2] the forces formed five Armies, with seven divisions of cavalry, and a cavalry corps of three divisions. The Reserve divisions were grouped into pairs or threes, and allotted either to Armies or defences, or kept at the disposal of General Headquarters.[3]

Map 2. The zones of concentration selected in peace for the five Armies were, commencing as usual on the right:

First Army (General Dubail)—Region of Epinal.
Second Army (General de Castelnau)—Region of Nancy.
Third Army (General Ruffey)—Region of Verdun.
Fifth Army (General Lanrezac)—Between Verdun (exclusive) and Mezières, with a detachment east of the Meuse.
Fourth Army (General de Langle de Cary)—In general reserve in region Sainte Ménehould—Commercy.
On either flank was a group of Reserve divisions:
On the right—a group of four Reserve divisions—Region of Belfort.
On the left—a group of three Reserve divisions (General Valabrègue)—Vervins.

The French Staff in choosing the areas of concentration were in face of the following facts. At Metz there was an immense entrenched camp touching the frontier, and connected by four main lines of railway with the heart of Germany. From this a sudden blow—the *attaque brusquée*—could be easily struck with all the force of perfect organization; and it was imperative to take measures to parry it. On the other hand, the German school of strategy favoured envelopment from one or both flanks. This in a war with France signified, indeed, violation either of Belgian or of Swiss neutrality, or of both; but Germany was not likely to be squeamish about such matters. Such violation might not go beyond a peaceable passage of troops across a corner of the neutral territory, yet still might suffice for the aggressor's purpose of turning a flank.

[1] The Reserve divisions were numbered by adding 50 to the army corps number up to the 71st: thus the I. Corps area provided the 51st Reserve division. The XIX. Corps was in Algeria.

[2] Known as No. 17; the text is given in Appendix 9.

[3] For the Order of Battle and organization of the French Armies see Appendices 3 and 4.

To meet menaces so different in kind as direct attack in the centre and envelopment on the flanks, the French General Staff decided to take the offensive and to concentrate facing the Eastern frontier, trusting to fortifications and to covering troops to gain sufficient time to move the mass of the army elsewhere if required. It was intended to attack as soon as possible with all forces united: the First and Second Armies south of Metz, and the Fifth north of it; the Third Army was to connect these two main attacks and arrange for the investment of Metz as they progressed. The employment of the Fourth Army depended on the action of the enemy; if the Germans moved into Luxembourg and Belgium, it was to co-operate with the Fifth Army; if the enemy merely covered the common frontier, it was to go to the support of the right attack. A detachment of the First Army (one corps and one cavalry division) was detailed in the plan to carry out a special operation on the extreme right in Alsace, with the object of holding any enemy forces which might attempt to advance on the western slopes of the Vosges, and of assisting in the removal of that part of the population which had remained faithful to France. It was hoped by the general offensive movement to dislocate the plans of the enemy and wrest the initiative from him.

No provision, it will be noticed, was made to meet an envelopment carried out through Belgium west of the Meuse, nor to cover the gap between the western flank of the Fifth Army and the sea, in which there were only local Territorial troops and a few old fortresses incapable of offering serious resistance to any invader. The information at the disposal of the French General Staff appeared to indicate that the Germans would attack from Metz, and had not sufficient troops to extend their front west of the Meuse. Beyond arranging for an alternative concentration of the Fourth and Fifth Armies should the enemy enter Luxembourg and Belgium, there was no preparation against a wide enveloping movement.

On mobilization, General Joffre, *vice-président du Conseil supérieur de la guerre et chef de l'État Major Général*, was appointed *Commandant en Chef* of the French Armies, with General Belin as Chief of the Staff.

The approximate strength of the Armies (with the Reserve divisions on the flanks included in the totals of the nearest Army) was, in round numbers, after certain

exchanges had taken place (viz. the transfer of two corps and two Reserve divisions from Fifth Army to Fourth, of one corps from Second to Fifth, etc.):—[1]

| | |
|---|---|
| First Army | 256,000 men |
| Second Army | 200,000 „ |
| Third Army | 168,000 „ |
| Fourth Army | 193,000 „ |
| Fifth Army | 254,000 „ |
| | 1,071,000 men |

## BELGIUM[2]

(See Sketch 1; Map 2)

In 1914 the Belgian Army consisted of a Field Army organized in six divisions and a cavalry division, and fortress troops which formed the garrisons of Antwerp, Liége and Namur. Antwerp was the great fortress of Belgium, the final refuge and rallying point of her forces and population in case of invasion by a powerful enemy. Its defences originally consisted of a strong enceinte, *i.e.* a continuous inner ring of fortification, and a girdle of forts, some two miles from the town, finished in 1868. Though a second girdle of forts and redoubts outside the first had been gradually added from 1882 onwards, the line was incomplete, there were several gaps and intervals in it, and it was on the average only some eight miles from the town, an altogether insufficient distance under modern conditions. Nor was the construction of the forts, although improvements were in progress, capable of resisting modern heavy artillery; and notwithstanding that the guns and flanking weapons were protected by armour, the fact that they were inside the forts, which were conspicuously upstanding, and not in well concealed batteries outside, made them easy targets. The same remarks as regards construction apply to the defences of Liége and Namur; these fortresses were "barrier forts and bridgeheads" on the Meuse;

[1] See footnote, p. 39.

[2] The details of the operations of the Belgian Army are taken from the official account: "L'Action de l'Armée Belge. Période du 31 juillet au 31 décembre 1914," which has since been translated as "Military "Operations of Belgium. Report compiled by the Belgian General Staff "for the period July 31st to December 31st, 1914" (London, Collingridge, 1s. net). For the Order of Battle see Appendix 5.

they constituted the first line of Belgium's resistance, and were designed to guard the approaches into Belgium from the east and south-east, and hinder any enemy from crossing the Meuse either from France into Germany or Germany into France. They were never intended to be defended *à outrance* and depended on field troops for the defence of the intervals between the forts. At Huy on the Meuse between Namur and Liége there was an ancient fort, which at best might secure sufficient time for the destruction of the railway bridges and tunnel there.

The reorganization of the Belgian Army authorized by the Government in 1912, had barely begun to take effect. In accordance with this a force of 350,000 men was to be formed: 150,000 for the Field Army, 130,000 for the fortress garrisons, and 70,000 for reserve and auxiliary troops. But these numbers would not in the ordinary course have been available until 1926. Actually in August 1914 only 117,000 could be mobilized for the Field Army, and a smaller proportion for the other categories.

The six divisions were stationed in peace so that at short notice they could quickly confront any enemy, were he Germany, France, Great Britain or Holland:—

1st Division around Ghent,
2nd Division, Antwerp,
3rd Division around Liége,
4th Division, Namur and Charleroi,
5th Division around Mons,
6th Division, Brussels,
Cavalry Division, Brussels.

Thus the 1st Division faced England; the 3rd, Germany; the 4th and 5th, France; and they were intended to act as general advanced guards as occasion arose and gain time for the movements of the other divisions to the threatened area.

On the ordinary peace footing only part of the recruit contingent was with the colours, so that in case of danger of war, the Belgian Army had first to recall men on unlimited leave, in order to raise its forces to "reinforced peace establishment," the ordinary strength of the units of the Continental Powers, and then to complete the numbers by mobilizing reservists. Thus not only was Belgium normally less ready than most nations, but she was in the throes of reorganization, and could not put into the field even as many men as the British Regular Army.

## GERMANY[1]

(See Plate 1)

From 1815 to 1860, the Prussian Army had practically remained stationary in numbers, with a peace strength of 150,000 men formed in eight Army Corps, maintained by a yearly contingent of 40,000 recruits, who served three years with the colours. One of the first acts of Wilhelm I. on coming to the throne in January 1860 was, in opposition to the wishes of his Legislature, to raise the annual contingent to 63,000, and the peace strength to 215,000. From thence onwards there was a steady increase of the military forces.

The war of 1866 made Prussia head of the North German Confederation, whilst Hesse-Darmstadt, Württemburg, Bavaria and Baden were bound to place their armies at the disposal of Prussia in time of war. In 1870, in addition to her original eight corps, she was able after arrangements with the other States to put into the field *the Guard, IX., X.* (*Hanoverian*), *XI.*, and *XII.* (*Saxon*), and *I. and II. Bavarian Corps*, and eventually the *XIII.* (*Württemburg*) and *XIV.* (*Baden*), with a war-strength of roughly 950,000.

The formation of the German Empire in 1871 made expansion still easier, for by the Constitution one per cent of the population could be in training under arms. The peace strengths sanctioned (which did not include officers and one-year volunteers) were :—

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1874 | 401,659 | |
| 1881 | 427,274 | |
| 1887 | 468,409 | |
| 1890 | 486,983 | (20 corps) |
| 1893 | 479,229 | and 77,864 N.C.O.'s (and two years' service introduced for all, except for horse-artillery and cavalry) |
| 1899 | 495,500 | (exclusive of N.C.O.'s) |
| 1911 | 509,839 | (exclusive of N.C.O.'s; gradually reached from 1905 onwards) |
| 1912 | 544,211 | (exclusive of N.C.O.'s) |
| 1913 | 640,782 | „ „ „ |

[1] For the Order of Battle and organization of the German Forces see Appendices 6 and 7.

In 1914, adding 36,000 officers, 110,000 N.C.O.'s, 18,000 one-year volunteers and 25,000 supernumerary recruits, the total number with the colours was about 850,000.

The approximate mobilizable strength was, in round figures :—

| | |
|---|---|
| Trained officers and men . . . | 4,300,000 |
| Partially trained . . . . . | 100,000 |
| Untrained . . . . . | 5,500,000 |
| | 9,900,000 |

The Army was organized into 25 Active army corps (50 divisions)—the *Guard*, *I.* to *XXI.*, and *I.*, *II.*, *III. Bavarian*; and in each army corps district organization was provided to form certain Reserve divisions (32),[1] *Ersatz* divisions (7), *Landwehr* brigades and regiments (equivalent to 16 divisions), from the supernumeraries in the depots. There were also 11 cavalry divisions. Plate 1.

The plan on which this great force would be used on the Eastern and Western fronts could only be surmised. It will, so far as it is known, be given later[2] after the opening moves of the campaign have been developed and described.

## Composition of German Formations

Service in the German Army was divided into :— service in the Active (or Standing) Army (two years, but three in the cavalry and horse artillery); service in the Reserve (five years, but four in the cavalry and horse artillery); service in the *Landwehr* (eleven years). The *Landsturm* included youths between 17 and 20, too young for service in the Army, and trained and untrained men between 39 and 45, who were thus over the ordinary military age.

The original *Reserve corps* which took part in the August offensive were formed mainly of Reserve men supernumerary to the requirements of the Active Army, with some *Landwehr*; but the *Guard Reserve Corps* contained an active division, and others, *e.g.* the *V.*, *VI.*, *VII.* and *IX.*, each contained an active brigade, as the active corps of these numbers had each in peace time an extra brigade; and others had similarly an active regiment. Soon after

[1] See footnote, p. 15.

[2] See p. 33.

declaration of war, additional Reserve divisions and corps were built up of volunteers (mainly youths under full military age and men not yet called up, etc.), with a substantial nucleus of about 25 per cent of trained men of the older classes.[1]

In peace the *Ersatz Reserve* consisted of men fit and liable for military service, but not called up for training because they were supernumerary to the annual contingents, or for family reasons, or on account of minor defects, or because they were temporarily unfit. It was originally intended to provide men to fill up the ranks of the Active Army and form its depots on mobilization. In 1914, however, with the help of fully-trained supernumerary officers, N.C.O.'s and men of the Reserve and *Landwehr*, it was formed into units, brigades and divisions.

The *Landwehr* units were formed of men who had completed seven years with the Active Army and Reserve, and were under 39 years of age.

As the war went on, the significance of the various classifications largely disappeared, and Active, *Ersatz*, Reserve and *Landwehr* divisions contained men of all categories.

[1] "Ypres 1914," p. 5.

# CHAPTER I

## THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

(See Sketch 1 ; Map 2)

THE story of the negotiations and of the diplomatic correspondence and conversations which took place after the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his Consort at Serajevo on the 28th June 1914 and before the outbreak of war, is available in an official narrative.[1] In this the efforts of the British Government

[1] "The Outbreak of the War 1914–1918 : A Narrative based mainly on British Official Documents," by Professor Sir Charles Oman. Published by H.M. Stationery Office, Price 2s. 6d.

Since this book was written, some further information with regard to the Potsdam Conference of the 5th and 6th July 1914 has been published in "Stenographische Berichte über die öffentlichen Verhandlungen des Unter-"suchungsausschusses der verfassunggebenden deutschen Nationalver-"sammlung," the shorthand reports of the Commission ordered by the German National Assembly to take evidence on matters affecting critical periods of the war. One of the terms of reference was : "It is to be "ascertained what political and military proceedings took place in Berlin "or Potsdam on the 5th and 6th July 1914."

In the evidence there given, General von Falkenhayn states that the Kaiser, on the afternoon of the 5th, warned him that the Army should be ready for all emergencies. Admiral Capelle and Admiral Behnke, temporary Chief of the Staff, Admiralty, were similarly warned ; these two officers then arranged to make such "intellectual preparations" (*intellektuele Vorbereitungen*) as were possible without arousing suspicion. Admiral Behnke then describes what was done :—the mobilization orders, etc., were carefully gone through and got ready, steps were taken for the immediate preparation of ships and auxiliary vessels, all ships filled up with fuel, the movements of ships were arranged in accordance with the situation, etc.

No evidence of the exact military measures taken was asked for or given at the Commission. An article in the "Revue Militaire Générale" of September 1919, however, gives a large number of extracts from captured German diaries and interrogations of prisoners which tend to shew that mobilization orders were issued secretly some days before the 31st July ; men on leave were recalled, the brigades on the frontiers intended for the surprise of Liége were brought up to war strength by the recall of reservists, and *Landsiurm* battalions were formed on 31st July to replace active troops in guarding the frontier, railways, etc. There would thus seem no room for doubt that in a variety of ways Germany gained a most valuable start of several days on her opponents.

27-31 July 1914.

to bring about mediation and their determination to take no step that would assist to precipitate war are clearly explained. It is therefore unnecessary here to allude to diplomatic events, except to show how the military preparations were affected by them.

On the 27th July, the British Government judged the situation to be sufficiently serious to warrant them in countermanding the dispersal, then in progress, of the Home Fleets at the end of the exercises at sea which had followed a test mobilization. At 5 P.M. on the 28th, the First Fleet was ordered to proceed to its preliminary war station in the North;[1] on the 29th, the Government further, at 2 P.M., ordered the precautionary measures arranged by the General Staff to meet an immediate prospect of war, to be put in force. These affected the Regular troops only, and included the recall of officers and men on leave and furlough, and the manning of the coast defences.

The Belgian Government decided to place the Army upon its "reinforced peace footing."[2]

On the same day, the 29th, the British Ambassador at Berlin was asked by the Chancellor to give assurance of England's neutrality if Russia should attack Austria and an European conflagration ensued. To this significant enquiry Sir Edward Grey, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, responded on the 30th by a refusal to entertain the proposal. Russia on that day issued orders for the mobilization of her four Southern Armies; and Germany threatened that she would mobilize unless Russia ceased. News was also received of the declaration of war by Austria-Hungary against Serbia and of the bombardment of Belgrade.

On the 31st July, Austria and Russia decreed the full mobilization of their forces, whereupon Germany made a formal proclamation of "imminent danger of war" (*drohende Kriegsgefahr*), which meant practically the introduction of Martial Law and the suspension of the usual civil rights, and permitted the calling to the colours of six classes of the Reserve; at the same time she presented an ultimatum to the effect that, unless Russia ceased mobilization within twelve hours, she herself would mobilize upon both frontiers. Significantly enough, Turkey also ordered

[1] The naval precautions taken will be found fully described in "The History of the War: Naval Operations," vol. i., by Sir Julian Corbett.

[2] See p. 19.

mobilization upon this day.[1] Sir Edward Grey, meanwhile, sent an identic request to Germany and France to enquire whether they would respect Belgian neutrality. On the 31st July France answered with an unequivocal affirmative. Germany, however, sent only an evasive reply; and on the 1st August both France and Germany ordered general mobilization. 1 Aug. 1914.

The beginning of mobilization in France raised a serious question for Great Britain. There was, it is true, no definite agreement nor understanding that she should send assistance to France, and the British Government was free to decide, untrammelled, for peace or war. But a scheme had been elaborated, in the event of certain contingencies, between the General Staffs of the two countries; and an essential point in this scheme was that the first movement of the British advanced parties, stores and so forth, should begin on the first day of mobilization. Assuming this coincidence of movement and mobilization, it was reckoned that six divisions—or four, if six could not be spared—one cavalry division and one cavalry brigade could be transported from Great Britain to concentration areas between Avesnes and Le Cateau, and would be ready to advance from them on the sixteenth day after the order for mobilization had been issued.

That the British mobilization, if it should take place at all, would be later than the French was now obvious. The British General Staff therefore suggested that measures might be taken to ensure that, if mobilization should come after all, movement to France of the advanced parties, which could be warned at once, should be simultaneous with the issue of the order for it. Another important measure was the guarding of the lines of railway to the ports of embarkation. This duty had been assigned to certain units of the Territorial Force; but these were about to proceed to camp for their annual training; and, unless the orders for that training were cancelled, there might be delay in the despatch of the Expeditionary Force. The Government considered, however, that the countermanding of the orders for Territorial training would be construed as not less menacing than the order for mobilization itself; and they shrank from any measure which might seem to extinguish the last hope of peace.

At 12 noon on the 1st August, the German ultimatum to Russia expired, and a general conflagration became in-

[1] The "1st day of mobilization" was the 3rd August.

2 Aug. 1914. evitable.[1] The Cabinet at 2 P.M. on the 2nd cancelled the orders for Territorial training and at 6 P.M. those for the manœuvres of the Army, but still issued no orders for mobilization. The Royal Navy was quite ready for active service; and the French Ambassador was assured that, if the German Fleet should enter the North Sea or the Channel with hostile designs against France, the British Fleet would give France its protection. Beyond this conditional promise of naval intervention the Cabinet would not go without consulting Parliament. Parliament was consulted on the following day, the 3rd August; but in the meanwhile a most momentous event had occurred.

Sketch 1. Map 2. At seven o'clock in the evening of the 2nd the German Minister at Brussels had presented a Note to the Belgian Government, requesting a reply within twelve hours. This Note had been drawn up by the Great General Staff as early as 26th July, and despatched under seal to the German Minister at Brussels on the 29th, with orders that it was not to be opened pending further instructions. It set forth that the German Government had certain intelligence of the intention of the French forces to march on the Meuse by Givet and Namur, and, in view of this attack, requested free and unresisted ingress for the German troops into Belgian territory. The Belgian Government replied that they would repel any attempt either of France or Germany upon Belgium; and meanwhile declined the help of France against any German encroachment until they should have made formal appeal to the Powers, Prussia among them, that had guaranteed Belgian neutrality. Faithful to the obligations imposed upon her by treaty, Belgium had already on the 1st August ordered her forces to be mobilized, and was preparing to resist violation of her territory from any quarter whatsoever.

Other important events on the 2nd August were that German troops crossed the Polish frontier, broke also into France at four different points, and entered the territory of Luxembourg.[2]

Sir Edward Grey had no accurate information as to the

[1] The German declaration of war was delivered by the Ambassador at Petrograd, Count Pourtales, at 7 P.M. on the 1st August; he at the same time demanded his passports (Kautsky's "Die deutsche Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch," vol. iii. pp. 50 and 83, which is confirmed by the Russian Orange Book).

[2] By the treaty of 1867 Prussia guaranteed the perpetual neutrality of Luxembourg; by the Convention of 1902 Germany re-insured the neutrality and stipulated that the railways in the Grand Duchy which she exploited should not be used for the transport of her troops.

exact nature of the German ultimatum to Belgium when he met the House of Commons on the 3rd August. He was aware, however, of the crude fact that an ultimatum had been tendered, and, whilst coming down to the House, he had been informed that King Albert had telegraphed to King George invoking England's diplomatic intervention to safeguard the integrity of Belgium. He presented, in due order, the course of action he had pursued and the motives dictating it. The House of Commons, as it followed him, applauded his decision not to commit the country to armed intervention on account of the Serbian quarrel, but approved the conditional promise of the Fleet's aid to France, and grew enthusiastic when it heard that England would be true to her engagements to uphold the integrity of Belgium. 3 Aug. 1914.

No resolution followed upon the speech of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. After the adjournment which followed it, towards 7 P.M., he was able to read to the House full information, received from the Belgian Legation, of the German Note that had been presented in Brussels. It left no doubt that a German attack was about to take place, if indeed it had not begun.

The immediate measures taken were to announce that a moratorium would be proclaimed and that the Government would undertake the responsibility of maritime insurance. The Territorial Force was embodied and the Naval Reserves were called out. It was now clear that our mobilization must take place at least three days later than the French, and that even so movement could not be simultaneous with it. The Government, however, reckoned that by this delay they had gained more than they had lost by securing the unanimity, or approximate unanimity, of the nation and the benevolence of neutrals.

On the 3rd August, at 6.45 P.M., Germany declared war on France, making alleged violation of her frontier by patrols and of her territory by aviators a pretext.[1] Italy, though a member of the Triple Alliance, declared that she would maintain her neutrality in the impending struggle.

Meanwhile Germany, being unhampered by moral considerations, completed her arrangements for the invasion of Belgium. On the morning of the 4th August, she declared war on Belgium, and two of her cavalry divisions

[1] These allegations have since been admitted to have been false. See M. Poincaré's "The Origins of the War," pp. 3 and 4.

4-6 Aug. 1914. passed the frontier; and in the afternoon the heads of infantry columns also entered Belgium.

Early in the afternoon of the 4th August Sir Edward Grey telegraphed to the British Ambassador at Berlin instructing him to ask for his passports if no satisfactory answer were given regarding the observation of Belgium's neutrality by 12 midnight (11 P.M. Greenwich mean time). At 4 P.M. the British Government gave orders for the mobilization of the Army. At 12.15 A.M. on the morning of the 5th August, the Foreign Office issued the following statement:

"Owing to the summary rejection by the German Govern-"ment of the request made by His Majesty's Government for "assurances that the neutrality of Belgium will be respected, "His Majesty's Ambassador at Berlin has received his passports "and His Majesty's Government have declared to the German "Government that a state of war exists between Great Britain "and Germany as from 11 P.M. on the 4th August."

On the 5th and 6th August, two meetings, attended by the principal Ministers, including Lord Kitchener, who became Secretary of State for War on the 6th, and by the leading members of the Staffs of the Navy and Army of Britain, were assembled to consider the conduct of the war. The exact state of affairs at the moment was that Great Britain, France and Russia were at war with Germany; that Belgium had been wantonly attacked but was making a better defence than had been expected; that Austria was at war with Serbia only; and that Italy was neutral. The main military questions to be decided were the employment and disposition of the Expeditionary Force, questions which were complicated by the delay in mobilization. It was determined first that the Force, less the 4th and 6th Divisions, should embark for the continent. In order to reduce the chance of a German landing in force interfering with this move, the Secretary of State decided that the 18th Infantry Brigade of the 6th Division, then at Lichfield, should move to Edinburgh, and two infantry brigades of the 4th Division should proceed to Cromer and York, in each case accompanied by some artillery. The 11th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Division was already at Colchester. Five cyclist battalions and eventually the Yeomanry Mounted Division were also sent to the East coast. The rest of the 6th Division was to remain in Ireland.

Then came the final decision as to the destination

of the Expeditionary Force. In view of the attack on Belgium, had the British contingent been of a size adequate for independent operations of a substantial character, there would have been much to be said in favour of making Antwerp the base of its military operations; but as it was so small, and as Antwerp, owing to part of the Schelde being Dutch territorial waters, would have to be reached overland after disembarkation at Ostend and other ports, and operations in the north might involve separation from the French, the suggestion was not followed. There remained the area, already considered with the French, namely, that around Le Cateau and Avesnes. Certain military opinion, however, was against a concentration of the British forces in any area in advance of Amiens. Finally, after discussion of the expansion of the army, it was agreed to leave the decision with our Allies, the French;[1] and the council broke up after passing three resolutions, namely—*First*, to embark ultimately five, but for the present only four of the divisions and the Cavalry Division of the Expeditionary Force, to commence on the 9th; *Secondly*, to bring home the Imperial troops from South Africa; *Thirdly*, to transport two Indian divisions to Egypt, but no further, and to urge the Government of India to send a division to capture Dar es Salaam in German East Africa. 6 Aug. 1914.

To Field-Marshal Sir John French, who had been selected to command the Expeditionary Force, special instructions as to his co-operation with the French were issued by the Secretary of State for War.[2]

Lieut.-General Sir Douglas Haig was appointed to command the I. Corps; Lieut.-General Sir James Grierson, the II. Corps; Lieut.-General W. P. Pulteney, the III. Corps; and Major-General E. Allenby, the Cavalry Division. The six divisions were to be commanded by Major-Generals S. H. Lomax, C. C. Munro, H. I. W. Hamilton, T. D'O. Snow, Sir C. Fergusson and J. L. Keir.

[1] According to Maréchal Joffre's official report to a Parliamentary Commission d'Enquête: "The directions for concentration did not "mention the place eventually reserved for the British Army. . . . Our "military arrangements with England had in fact a character which was "both secret and contingent (*éventuel*), and made it improper to mention "them in such a document. . . . In the event of its arrival, its employment "was looked for at the place which should be logically reserved for it, on the "left of the line of the French Armies, which it would thus prolong." "La Préparation de la Guerre et la conduite des opérations." Par Le Maréchal Joffre, p. 21.

[2] Appendix 8.

## PROGRESS OF EVENTS

### England

(See Sketch 1 ; Maps 1 & 2)

4 Aug. 1914. At 4 P.M. on the 4th August, as already stated, the order for mobilization of the Expeditionary and Territorial Forces was issued by the British Government. As a matter of fact, mobilization occurred at an extremely awkward moment, for the 3rd August had been Bank Holiday and, as usually is the case in the middle of summer, Territorial units were in the act of moving to various camps for their annual training when the orders cancelling it arrived. Hence arose the question whether the existing time-tables for concentration should stand, or whether the movements by railway should be postponed. The Cabinet decided for a short postponement, and gave orders, as already mentioned, that the embarkation of the Expeditionary Force should not begin until the 9th, and for the present to hold back the 4th and 6th Divisions. Meantime the mobilization of the various units proceeded with the smoothness which had been anticipated. In all essentials everything went " according to plan " ; and even the task of collecting 120,000 horses was accomplished within twelve days. Embarkation was conducted upon the principle that every train-load should be a complete unit or subdivision of a unit, so that upon arrival in France after its passage, it should be self-contained, possessing transport enough to go straight into a rest-camp or into another train. The ports of embarkation were as follows :

*Great Britain*

Southampton—for all troops.
Avonmouth—motor transport and petrol.
Newhaven—stores and supplies.
Liverpool—frozen meat and motor transport.
Glasgow—a few details.

*Ireland*

Dublin, Cork, Belfast } for the 5th and 6th Divisions.

The ships were also divided into classes : (1) personnel

ships; (2) horse and vehicle ships; (3) motor transport ships; (4) store ships. 4 Aug. 1914.

The ports of disembarkation in France were: Havre, Rouen and Boulogne. Sketch 1. Map 2.

In the five days of greatest activity 1,800 special trains were run in Great Britain and Ireland; on the busiest day of all, eighty trains, containing the equivalent of a division, were run into Southampton Docks; the daily average of ships despatched was thirteen, with an average daily tonnage of about 52,000 tons gross. At first the transports were despatched singly as they were ready, both by day and by night, for, as yet, there was no menace by German submarines, and the measures taken by the Royal Navy gave absolute security.[1] Everything went regularly and smoothly, and the official programme was carried out to the letter; but there was little margin to spare.

## Belgium

Meanwhile the situation in Belgium and on the French frontier was developing rapidly. When during the night of the 3rd/4th August, it became clear that the Germans intended to advance through Belgium, with or without permission, the Belgian Staff at once took the measures necessary for the defence of their country's neutrality against Germany. The 3rd Division, supported by the fortifications of Liége, was to check the German advance; and, under cover of the 3rd Division, the 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 6th Divisions were to move to the line of the river Gette, the Cavalry Division and detachments from Liége and Namur screening the movement. This position covered a considerable part of Belgium, Brussels and the communications with Antwerp. The concentration began on the 4th August, and by the morning of the 6th the Belgian Army was in position two marches west of Liége, in the area Tirlemont (1st Division), Perwez (5th Division), Louvain (2nd Division), and Wavre (6th Division). Map 1.

On the morning of the 4th, when German cavalry crossed the Belgian frontier and moved upon Visé, north of Liége, it found the bridge over the Meuse broken, and the western bank held by Belgian troops. Two regiments

[1] See "Naval Operations," i. p. 72 *et seq.*, and also footnote 3, p. 11 above.

5 Aug. 1914. were then pushed northward to Lixhe (3 miles north of Visé), where they crossed the river by a ford. The Belgians, finding their left threatened, thereupon fell back on Liége. By evening the heads of six small German columns of all arms which had crossed the frontier were nearly two miles into Belgium. Further concentrations were also reported to the south; and it became evident that a very large army threatened invasion along the lines of advance guarded by the fortress of Liége and by the 3rd Division.

## Liége

(See Sketches 1 & 2; Maps 1, 2, & 5)

On the 5th August, the Germans, having bridged the Meuse at Lixhe, pushed forward patrols to Tongres (about ten miles N.N.W. of Liége); and the commander-in-chief of the invading troops, General von Emmich, demanded free passage through Liége. This being at once refused, he attempted to seize the place by a *coup de main*. His troops consisted of six infantry brigades (said to be at peace strength) provided by the *III.*, *IV.*, *VI.*, *X.*, and *XI. Corps*, each with a squadron of cavalry, a battery of artillery, a battalion of *Jäger* (Rifles), and cyclists attached to it. Two of the six batteries had field guns, and the other four, field howitzers. Besides this force, General von Emmich had at his disposal two heavy mortar batteries, and General von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps*, comprising the *2nd*, *4th*, and *9th Cavalry Divisions*.[1]

After an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap the Commandant of Liége, General von Emmich gave orders for a night attack. His general plan was to make a demonstration against the forts with a few companies, and to send the six brigades through the intervals between them to secure the town and citadel, and then to fall upon the forts from the rear. This attack was delivered soon after nightfall in five columns; two from the north and north-east; one, the central column, from the east; and two from the south. The first two columns, for the most part, lost their way, and fell back after suffering heavy losses, though one battalion penetrated into Liége and was there captured. Of the two southern columns, one halted, having casualties so severe as to forbid further progress, and the other was seized with panic, the men firing upon

[1] "Lüttich-Namur."

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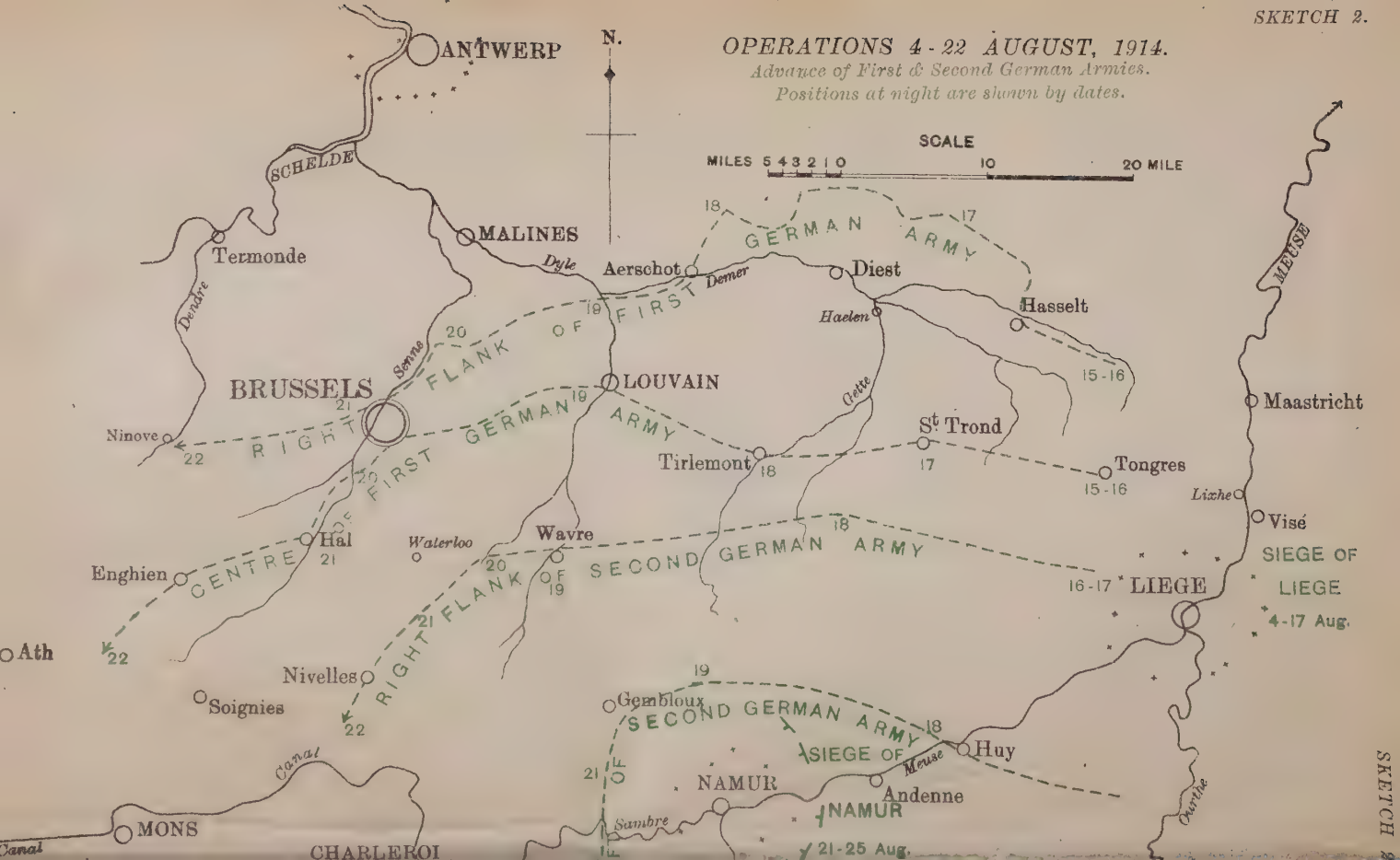
OPERATIONS 4-22 AUGUST, 1914.
Advance of First & Second German Armies.
Positions at night are shown by dates.
N.
SCALE
MILES 5 4 3 2 1 0 10 20 MILE
ANTWERP
SCHELDE
MALINES
Termonde
Dendre
Dyle
Aerschot
Demer
Diest
GERMAN ARMY
Hasselt
Haelen
MEUSE
Maastricht
BRUSSELS
Senne
FLANK OF FIRST
LOUVAIN
Ninove
RIGHT
FIRST GERMAN ARMY
Gette
St Trond
Tirlemont
Tongres
Lixhe
Visé
SIEGE OF LIEGE
4-17 Aug.
Hal
CENTRE OF
Waterloo
Wavre
SECOND GERMAN ARMY
Enghien
RIGHT FLANK OF
LIEGE
Ath
Nivelles
Soignies
Gembloux
SECOND GERMAN ARMY
SIEGE OF
Huy
Meuse
NAMUR
Andenne
Canal
Sambre
MONS
CHARLEROI
Ourthe
21-25 Aug.

each other. The central column met with serious resistance, the brigadier and the commander of the leading regiment being killed. It was on the point of falling back when Major-General Ludendorff, who, as Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the *Second Army*, was with General von Emmich watching the operations, came up and, taking command, pushed on. He was specially interested, for he had planned these very operations in peace when Chief of the Operations Section of the Great General Staff. After giving his men a rest, he renewed the attack in the forenoon of the 6th, and advanced until his leading troops were within a mile of Liége. Though unsupported by the other columns, he decided to make a dash for the citadel, and on advancing found practically no opposition. The Belgian Staff, anticipating that the 3rd Division might be surrounded, had withdrawn it to the Gette; so the Germans found themselves in possession of the town of Liége. 5-17 Aug. 1914.

The true siege of the fortress then began. Von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* worked round to the western side of the defences, and the German artillery shelled the forts. On the 12th, 42-cm. howitzers were brought up, and the last of the forts fell at 8.30 A.M. on the 16th. General Leman, the gallant commandant, was taken unconscious from under a heap of wreckage and made prisoner. He had nobly done his duty, and by delaying the German advance had rendered transcendent service to the cause of Belgium's Allies.[1]

Meanwhile, on the 10th, German cavalry and *Jäger*[2]

[1] The time gained to the Allies would appear to have been about four or five days. According to von Kluck (pp. 10-19), his three leading corps were on the line Kermpt—Stevort—Gorssum, forty miles (say three marches) west of Aix La Chapelle, on the night of the 17th. They had begun to arrive in the concentration area north-east of Aix on the 7th. Had Liége offered no opposition and had they at once marched off into Belgium, there seems no reason why the *II.*, *III.* and *IV. Corps* should not have reached the above line on the 10th, and completed concentration there on the 12th or 13th—four or five days earlier than was the case. The six composite brigades and cavalry corps which attacked Liége were available to cover the concentration. Even on the 10th August the German Supreme Command hoped to commence the advance on the 13th, five days earlier than was possible (v. Bülow, pp. 11, 12). According to post-war German publications however, *e.g.* "Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg" by Foerster, the German time-table made the armies reach the line Thionville—Sédan—Mons, on the 22nd day of mobilization (23rd August), and they were actually slightly ahead of it. Belgian opinion is that at least four days were gained ("Bulletin Belge des Sciences Militaires," Sept. 1921). Sketch 1.

[2] It must always be borne in mind that a German cavalry division is a mixed force of all arms, with two or more *Jäger* (Rifle) battalions included. (See Plate 1.)

12-20 Aug. 1914.

Sketches 1 & 2. Maps 1, 2, & 5.

appeared before the line of the Gette, and gradually extended north as far as Hasselt (18 miles north-east of Tirlemont) and Diest (12 miles north of Tirlemont). On the 12th six German cavalry regiments, with three horse-batteries and two *Jäger* battalions attacked the line of the Gette at Haelen, a little to the south-east of Diest, and made some progress, but were ultimately driven back by the Belgians, with appreciable loss, after ten hours of sharp fighting.

German troops, however, continued to pour into Belgium, and by the 17th the space between the Meuse, the Demer and the Gette was occupied by them in strength, in spite of the fact that the Belgian Army, assisted by the Garde Civique, had systematically obstructed the roads and destroyed the bridges. The right flank of the line of the Gette was already threatened, and columns to support the turning movement were passing the Meuse at Huy, where the bridge, blown up by the Belgians, had been repaired. On the 18th, the Germans again attacked and carried Haelen, and also entered Tirlemont. They then fell upon the front and left flank of the Belgian 1st Division, and only by hard fighting were held at bay. The Gette position was now evidently in imminent danger. It was certain that the German *II.*, *IV.* and *IX. Corps*, covered by the *2nd* and *4th Cavalry Divisions* were opposite the Belgian left between Diest and Tirlemont; whilst the *Guard*, *X.* and *VII. Corps* were marching against the Belgian right on a front from Jodoigne (7 miles S.S.W. of Tirlemont) to Namur. It was also known that the Active corps were being followed by Reserve formations, namely, in the *First Army*, by the *III.*, *IV.* and *IX. Reserve Corps*; in the *Second Army* by the *Guard*, *VII.* and *X. Reserve Corps*; and in the *Third Army* by the *XII. Reserve Corps*. The French and the British, as will be seen, were neither of them yet at hand to give assistance; and it was hopeless for the Belgians to think of contending against odds of four or five to one. Accordingly, on the evening of the 18th, the five Belgian divisions were skilfully drawn off from the Gette north-westward to Antwerp, and on the 20th entered the lines of that fortress without being seriously molested. There, on the flank of the Germans if they advanced westward, and in their rear if they should turn southward, the Belgian Army remained—an effective menace to the enemy.[1]

[1] According to von Hausen, the commander of the *Third Army* ("Marne-

## Namur

(Map 5)

Further to the south, about Namur, where the 4th Belgian Division was stationed, German cavalry patrols were in touch with the Belgian cavalry to the north of the fortress on the 5th August, and to the south-east of it on the 7th. But it was not until nearly a fortnight later that the main bodies of the enemy approached; and meanwhile, on the 19th, the garrison had been joined by the 8th Belgian Infantry Brigade which, finding itself completely isolated at Huy, had blown up the bridge over the Meuse there and fallen back on Namur. On that day the *Guard Reserve Corps* of the German *Second Army* appeared on the north of the fortress, and the *XI. Corps*, consisting of the *22nd* and *38th Divisions*, of the *Third Army*, on the south-east, the whole under the command of General von Gallwitz. With these troops was a large proportion of heavy artillery, including four batteries of Austrian 30·5-cm. mortars and one of Krupp's 42-cm. howitzers. 5-23 Aug. 1914.

On the 20th August, the Germans drove in the Belgian outposts, and on the 21st opened fire on the eastern and south-eastern forts. The Belgian commandant was powerless either to keep these monster howitzers at a distance or to silence them by counter-batteries. Before evening two of the principal forts had been very seriously damaged; and within another twenty-four hours both were practically destroyed. Two Belgian counter-attacks on the 22nd August failed; and by the evening of the 23rd the northern and eastern fronts had been laid bare, and five out of the whole circle of nine forts were in ruins. At midnight the garrison withdrew south-westward into France, whence it later rejoined the main Belgian Army at Antwerp.

Thus for eighteen days the Belgians had faced the German invasion, delaying the hostile advance during a

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schlacht," p. 244, footnote), the *III. Reserve Corps* and *IX. Reserve Corps* were originally detailed to push forward to the coast "direction Calais," but this order was cancelled when the Belgian Army went into Antwerp, and both corps were sent to watch it. Later, in early September, the *XV. Corps* was detained near Brussels on account of a sortie being expected from Antwerp. These three corps were absent from the battle of the Marne, though the *IX. Reserve* and *XV. Corps* reached the Aisne in time to oppose the Allied crossing. There were further employed at the siege: the *4th Ersatz Division* (sent from the *Sixth Army*), the *1st Ersatz Reserve Division*, a *Matrosen Division*, the *26th* and *37th Landwehr Brigades*, besides heavy artillery and engineers.

2-12 Aug. 1914. most critical period, and gaining time which was of priceless value to the Allies. In addition to this great strategic advantage, the fact that the first German operations against fortresses, conducted under the conditions obtaining in modern warfare, were so rapidly successful gave warning to the French to readjust their conceptions of the defensive value of their fortified front, and reorganize it on lines calculated to counter the effect of bombardment by heavy howitzers.

## The Operations of the French[1]

(See Maps 1, 2, & 5)

On the 2nd August, the day of the presentation to Belgium of the German ultimatum, the French Commander-in-Chief decided to use "the alternative concentration areas" for the Fourth and Fifth Armies, so as to interpolate the former in the general line, and extend the left wing further towards the north.

Map 1. On the 3rd, General Sordet's Cavalry Corps began to move forward east of Mezières, and on the 5th it was ordered, with the consent of King Albert, to enter Belgium to ascertain the direction of advance of the enemy and to delay his columns. General Sordet crossed the frontier on the 6th and moved first towards Neufchateau (36 miles east of Mezières). Then, striking north, he eventually arrived within nine miles of Liége; but, finding that the Belgian field troops had been withdrawn from the area of the fortress, he retired in the direction of the Meuse. Valuable information was obtained by him as to the enemy's movements from an officer who was captured on the 9th, but otherwise the intelligence gained in the strategic reconnaissance was negative, and it did not achieve its secondary object of delaying the enemy's advance; for, owing to the resistance of Liége, no important columns of German troops had at the time entered the area explored.

To assist the Belgian Army and support the cavalry, the I. Corps of the French Fifth Army was sent forward on the 12th August from Mezières northwards "to oppose any

[1] Taken mainly from General Joffre's statement to the Parliamentary Commission d'Enquête; Défense du bassin de Briey; the very lucid commentary on this Commission, by its *rapporteur*, M. Fernand Engerand, entitled "La Bataille de la Frontière"; and the official publication "Quatre Mois de Guerre: Rapport sur l'ensemble des opérations du 2 août au 2 décembre 1914."

attempts of the enemy to cross the Meuse between Givet and Namur." On the 15th, in conjunction with General Mangin's 8th Infantry Brigade (specially detailed to support the Cavalry Corps), it repulsed an attempt of von Richthofen's *Cavalry Corps* (*Guard* and *5th Cavalry Divisions*) to cross near Dinant. 6-15 Aug. 1914.

Between the 6th and 8th August, it became certain that an enemy force containing units belonging to five different army corps was operating against Liége; but the main group of the German Armies appeared to the French General Staff to be around Metz in front of Thionville and Luxembourg. The enemy was thus, it was thought, in a position either to advance westwards if Liége fell, or if Liége held out to wheel southwards, pivoting on Metz. A decision was therefore made by General Joffre, and communicated to the French Armies on the 8th August,[1] to the effect that his intention was to bring the Germans to battle with all his forces united as in the original plan, with his right extended to the Rhine. If necessary, the left of the line would be held back, so as to avoid the premature engagement of one of the Armies before the others could come to its assistance. If, however, the enemy's right were delayed in front of Liége, or turned southwards, the left would be advanced. As the concentration would not be finished until the 18th, it was still too early to give detailed orders; but the instructions provided for the Armies gaining ground as soon as they were ready to move.

Meantime in Alsace, "to facilitate the attack of the main Armies," the small offensive—outlined in the original plan—was commenced on the extreme right by a detachment of the First Army, consisting of the VII. Corps and 8th Cavalry Division. This detachment crossed the frontier on the 6th August. After its advanced guard had reached Mulhausen, it found itself in the presence of superior forces, and was withdrawn. On the 14th the offensive was renewed with a stronger force, called the Army of Alsace, consisting of the VII. Corps, the Alpine and three Reserve divisions, under General Pau. On the same date the First and Second Armies began their forward movement across the frontier. For the Armies on the left only certain precautions were ordered. But during the afternoon of the 15th, news came from the Belgian Army that 200,000 Germans were crossing the Meuse

[1] In *Instruction Générale* No. 1, dated 8th August 1914, 7 A.M.

15-16 Aug. 1914. below Visé, and from the I. Corps of the attack at Dinant; the Grand Quartier Général (G.Q.G.) in consequence ordered the III. and X. Corps of the Fifth Army to join the I. Corps. General Lanrezac was further directed to hand his II. Corps and group of Reserve divisions to the Fourth Army, in compensation for which there were sent to him two recently arrived African divisions and the XVIII. Corps, originally in the Second Army, from the General Reserve. The Fourth Army then occupied the ground vacated by the Fifth, and the Third took over the objectives lately assigned to the Fourth. The duty of masking Metz was given to a new force, the Army of Lorraine, composed of three Reserve divisions from the Third Army and three others sent up for the purpose; General Maunoury, who had originally been on the Italian frontier, was given command of it. There was thus a general taking of ground to the left.

General Joffre's general plan of operations now began to take definite shape as cumulative evidence showed that the main German advance was in progress through Belgium.

Map 2. The situation as it presented itself to him on the 16th August was as follows:

> "In the north, seven or eight German army corps and four "cavalry divisions are endeavouring to pass westwards between "Givet and Brussels, and even beyond these points."

In the centre between Bastogne and Thionville there were thought to be six or seven army corps, and two or three cavalry divisions. South of Metz, the Germans appeared to be on the defensive.

His intention now was to make the principal attack with the Third and Fourth Armies through Luxembourg and Belgian Luxembourg, so as to strike at the flank and communications of the enemy forces which had crossed the Meuse between Namur and the Dutch frontier, and if possible attack them before they could deploy for battle by wheeling south. To support this offensive the First and Second Armies were to make only a secondary attack between Metz and the Vosges, for the purpose of holding the enemy, who seemed to be gradually shifting westwards, and who otherwise might be able to take in flank the French Armies attacking in Luxembourg. Lastly, the left wing, consisting of the Fifth Army, the British Army when it should arrive, and the Belgian Army, was to move up so as to hold in check any German forces that might

advance from the Meuse, and so gain sufficient time to allow the attack of the Third and Fourth Armies to become effective. In order to give weight to the attack, the Third and Fourth Armies were considerably strengthened.[1] 20 Aug. 1914.

In brief, General Joffre's first object was to break the enemy's centre, and then he intended to fall with all available forces on the right or western wing of the German Armies.

The general advance was to take place on the 21st. The positions on the morning of the 20th indicate the preliminary movements which had been made for the purpose. They were :

The Army of Alsace had reached Mulhausen.

The First and Second Armies were across the frontier in front of Lunéville and Nancy, from near Sarrebourg to Delme, about thirty-six miles north-west of Sarrebourg.

The Army of Lorraine observed Metz.

The Third and Fourth Armies were close up to the Belgian frontier, astride the river Chiers, from near Longwy to Sedan, ready to cross the river Semoy. Map 5.

The Fifth Army was disposed :

The I. Corps and 8th Infantry Brigade on the Meuse, near Dinant, facing east, with

The 51st Reserve Division marching up from the south to act as a link between the French Fourth and Fifth Armies.

The X. and III. Corps, each with an African division attached to it, lay along the Sambre near Charleroi, facing north.

The XVIII. Corps was echeloned to the left rear on the line Gozée—Thuin (6 miles and 9 miles south-west of Charleroi).

General Valabrègue's two remaining Reserve divisions were on the left of the XVIII. Corps and north-east of Maubeuge, in the gap into which General Joffre intended the British Army should move up.

[1] To make the changes clear, they are enumerated together here :

The Third Army was reinforced by one Reserve division, and then by two more.

The Fourth Army took over from the Fifth Army : II. Corps ; XI. Corps ; 52nd and 60th Reserve Divisions (leaving it the 51st) ; a cavalr division ; and the Moroccan Division from the IX. Corps of the Second Army.

The Fifth Army, to make up for this, received the 37th and 38th Divisions from Africa ; the XVIII. Corps from the Second Army ; and General Valabrègue's Group of three Reserve divisions. So that the corps it now contained were the I., III., X., and XVIII., with the 37th Division added to the III. and the 38th to the X.

20-21 Aug. 1914.

Further to the west and beyond the space to be occupied by the British, were three Territorial divisions under General d'Amade, the 84th near Douai, the 82nd near Arras, and the 81st between Hazebrouck and St. Omer.

It will be observed that the front of the Fifth Army under General Lanrezac along the Meuse and Sambre formed a salient, at the apex of which was the Belgian fortress of Namur, on which by the evening of the 20th the Germans were closing. Consequently, any failure of his right to hold its ground on the Meuse would place his centre and left in a very dangerous situation, and render them liable to be cut off.

On the 20th, however, before the general advance had begun, misfortunes had already overtaken the French. "The First and Second Armies, tired by several days of marching and fighting, came up against strongly organized positions, armed with powerful artillery, whose fire was admirably prepared and corrected by aeroplanes." After being violently counter-attacked, the Second Army was compelled to retire and the First had to conform to its movements. The actions in which they were engaged are known as the battles of Sarrebourg and Morhange (25 miles north-west of Sarrebourg).[1]

On the 21st August, in spite of this reverse to the right wing, the Third and Fourth Armies crossed the frontier and advanced from ten to fifteen miles into the difficult Ardennes country, hilly, wooded, and with marshy bottoms. They were then met by the Armies of the German Crown Prince and Duke Albert of Württemberg, numerically slightly superior to them,[2] and, after fighting the actions known as the battles of Virton and the Semoy[3] were compelled to fall back towards the Meuse. The attempt to break in the German centre before the right wing could

[1] It may be added here that an attempted pursuit of the Second Army by the Germans received a serious check on the 25th, for, in spite of the reverse, the French First Army returned to the offensive and struck them in flank. After some indecisive fighting, the situation of the French First and Second Armies became stabilized on a line in France, just inside the frontier.

[2]

| *French.* | | *German.* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Third Army | 168,000 | Fifth Army | 200,000 |
| Fourth Army | 193,000 | Fourth Army | 180,000 |
| | 361,000 | | 380,000 |

[3] Longwy and Neufchateau in German accounts.

deliver its blow against the Allied left wing had thus failed, owing to the facts that the enemy forces in the Ardennes were stronger than had been anticipated and part were deployed behind positions ready to receive the attack; thanks however to a premature enveloping attack attempted by the German Crown Prince the reverse was less serious than it might otherwise have been. 17 Aug. 1914.

As regards the French Fifth Army, General Lanrezac had considered it inadvisable to advance simultaneously with the Armies on his right. He preferred to wait until his reinforcements should have arrived, which would not be until the 23rd;[1] until the Fourth Army should have cleared the gorges of the Semoy and shortened by its advance the eastern face of the salient which the front of the Fifth Army presented to the enemy; and until the British Army should similarly have come up on his left. As will presently be seen, Sir John French's force on the 21st was approaching the line of the Mons—Condé Canal. The general situation in which it was about to play its part may be thus summarized:—

The French First and Second Armies were retiring after the battles of Sarrebourg and Morhange;

The Third and Fourth "had failed, and the reverse seemed serious";

The Fifth Army was in a salient about to be attacked by two German Armies;

Namur was on the point of falling (the last fort surrendered on the 25th); and

The Belgian Army had been driven into Antwerp.

## Operations of the Germans[2]

(See Sketch 1; Maps 1, 2, & 5)

Leaving only three Active corps and three Reserve divisions, assisted by a cavalry division, one *Ersatz* division and *Landwehr* formations, some 250,000 men in all, on her Eastern frontier, where she had the co-operation of the Austro-Hungarian Army, and the *IX. Reserve Corps* (until the 23rd August) and *Landwehr* formations in Schleswig to guard against a possible landing, Germany had assembled

[1] See p. 38.

[2] This summary of the early German operations is compiled from the authorities now available: von Bülow, von Kluck, von Hausen, von Kuhl, General Staff Monographs, etc.

17 Aug. 1914. on her Western frontier seven Armies,[1] with Generaloberst von Moltke as Chief of the General Staff and practically in command.

Sketch 1. Maps 1 & 2. By the evening of the 17th August [2] these Armies were concentrated, ready to move, on a long front extending from the fortress of Strasbourg to the Dutch frontier north of Liége. This front ran through Sarrebourg, Metz and Thionville ; [3] up the centre of the Duchy of Luxembourg (the neutrality of which had been violated on the 2nd August), to Liége ; and to the north-west of this fortress, where the northernmost German Army, von Kluck's, was deployed facing the Belgians on the Gette. In order to reach the far side of the neutral barrier formed by the projecting peninsula of Dutch Limbourg, behind which it had been assembled, it had defiled in three columns through Aix La Chapelle. The Supreme Command Orders directed the Armies of von Kluck (*First*) and von Bülow (*Second*), acting together under the latter general,[4] to deal with the Belgian Army, to force it away from Antwerp and to reach the line Namur—Brussels. The *First Army* was to detail a detachment to mask Antwerp, and provide against a British landing on the coast by holding back its right. Von Hausen's (*Third*) Army was to gain the line of the Meuse from Givet to Namur. Namur was to be attacked and taken as soon as possible by the left of the *Second* and the right of the *Third Armies*. Meanwhile, the *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies* were to conform so that the whole five Armies on the right might carry out a gigantic wheel, first on to the line Thionville—Brussels, and then forward in a south-westerly direction, Thionville still remaining the pivot.

[1] For Order of Battle, see Appendices 6 and 7.
Approximate numbers were, excluding higher cavalry formations :

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *First Army* | 320,000 | men |
| *Second Army* | 260,000 | ,, |
| *Third Army* | 180,000 | ,, |
| *Fourth Army* | 180,000 | ,, |
| *Fifth Army* | 200,000 | ,, |
| *Sixth Army* | 220,000 | ,, |
| *Seventh Army* | 125,000 | ,, |
| | 1,485,000 | ,, |

A French calculation in "La Revue Militaire Générale" for January 1920 gives 1,440,000.

[2] See "Lüttich-Namur," p. 67.

[3] The continuous fortifications round and connecting these two places form the so-called Moselle Position.

[4] The order of the 17th August which placed von Kluck under von Bülow was cancelled on the 27th, but reissued on the 10th September.

The strategical conception dominating the initial deployment of the German Armies on the Western front and the invasion of Belgium and France has, during 1919–1920, been disclosed by the publications of several German General Staff officers,[1] and their statements are confirmed by the order issued on 5th September by the German Supreme Command.[2]

The strategic objective was to outflank the French by the west and drive them eastwards against the Swiss frontier. On completion of the deployment, the *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies*, under the senior army commander, Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, were to advance against the Moselle, below Frouard (5 miles north-north-west of Nancy), and the Meurthe; they were to hold fast the French forces (the First and Second Armies) assembled there, and prevent any of them from being transferred to the left wing to oppose the main German advance. If attacked seriously, Prince Rupprecht was to retire to a prepared position flanked by Strasbourg and Metz.[3]

Meanwhile, the great wheel on Thionville was to be continued. By the 22nd day of mobilization (23rd August) it was expected that the five Armies on the right would have reached the line Ghent—Mons—Sedan—Thionville; by the 31st day (1st September) the line Amiens—La Fère—Rethel—Thionville.[4] Whilst the other Armies held their ground—the *Second Army* digging in on the line of the Oise or Oise—Aisne and thus covering Paris on the north side—the *First Army*, with all its original fourteen divisions,[5] was to sweep over the lower Seine,[6] past the west of Paris and round the south. It was to be followed by *Ersatz* divisions, detailed to complete the investment of the fortress. When they were in position, the *First Army*, reinforced by the *Sixth Army* and by every division that could be spared from the other Armies, was to advance eastwards and drive the French against their Moselle fortresses, the Jura and

[1] *E.g.* von Kuhl, Foerster, Tappen, Baumgarten-Crusius.

[2] See Baumgarten-Crusius's "Die Marneschlacht, 1914," p. 73.

[3] The subsequent advance of the German *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies*, which resulted in a double envelopment being attempted, was not, we are told, originally intended. It was only permitted in consequence of the initial success of those Armies against the French, and the difficulties of sending troops from them to the right flank as planned, owing to the damage done to the Belgian railways (Tappen, pp. 13-15).

[4] This was accomplished in spite of the Belgian resistance, if we accept the time-table published in Germany since the war.

[5] Four (*III. R.* and *IX. R. Corps*) had to be left to invest Antwerp.

[6] The order to advance to the lower Seine was actually given to the *First Army*, in spite of its reduced numbers, on the 27th August.

Alsace, contained about 456,000 French. The offensive of the Armies of Ruffey and de Langle de Cary north of Thionville, commencing on the 21st August, encountered the German *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies*, which had begun on the 17th to wheel forward to the line Thionville—Givet. Thus two Armies met two Armies of about equal strength.

Map 5. The result of the above operations was, practically, equilibrium, but it left three German Armies, von Hausen's, von Bülow's and von Kluck's, comprising in all thirty-four divisions, free to deal with Lanrezac's Army, the tiny British Army of four divisions, and the almost equally small Belgian Army of six divisions—thirty-four divisions against twenty, with a frontier destitute of natural obstacles, guarded only by obsolete fortresses, and the shortest and most direct road to Paris in front of them.

The first step in the German plan had therefore been successful, as regards its objectives; the line laid down for the first stage of the wheel on Thionville had been reached, and Liége and Namur had been taken; it was unsuccessful only in that the Belgian Army had not been forced away from Antwerp, which it entered, after rear-guard fighting, on the 20th. Surprise has sometimes been expressed that the Germans did not push at least detachments to the Channel ports in August 1914, when there was no force available to oppose them except some Territorial units. It would appear that they did intend to do so, but the necessity of investing the Belgian Army in Antwerp absorbed the two corps, *III. Reserve* and *IX. Reserve*, which had been selected for this purpose;[1] and when the opening phase of the campaign was going so nearly according to plan, and there seemed a certainty of winning the war in a few days by a defeat of the French in a super-Sedan in the open field, it would have been strategically unjustifiable to divert a single man to seize a section of the coast, which, like Italy after the battle of Austerlitz, must have yielded to the invaders without serious conflict directly the main decision had fallen.

## The British Entry into France

(See Sketches 1 & 3; Maps 2 & 3)

12 Aug. Sketch 1. Map 2. On the 12th August, the Commander-in-Chief, retaining only a small party of his immediate staff with him,

[1] See footnote, p. 34.

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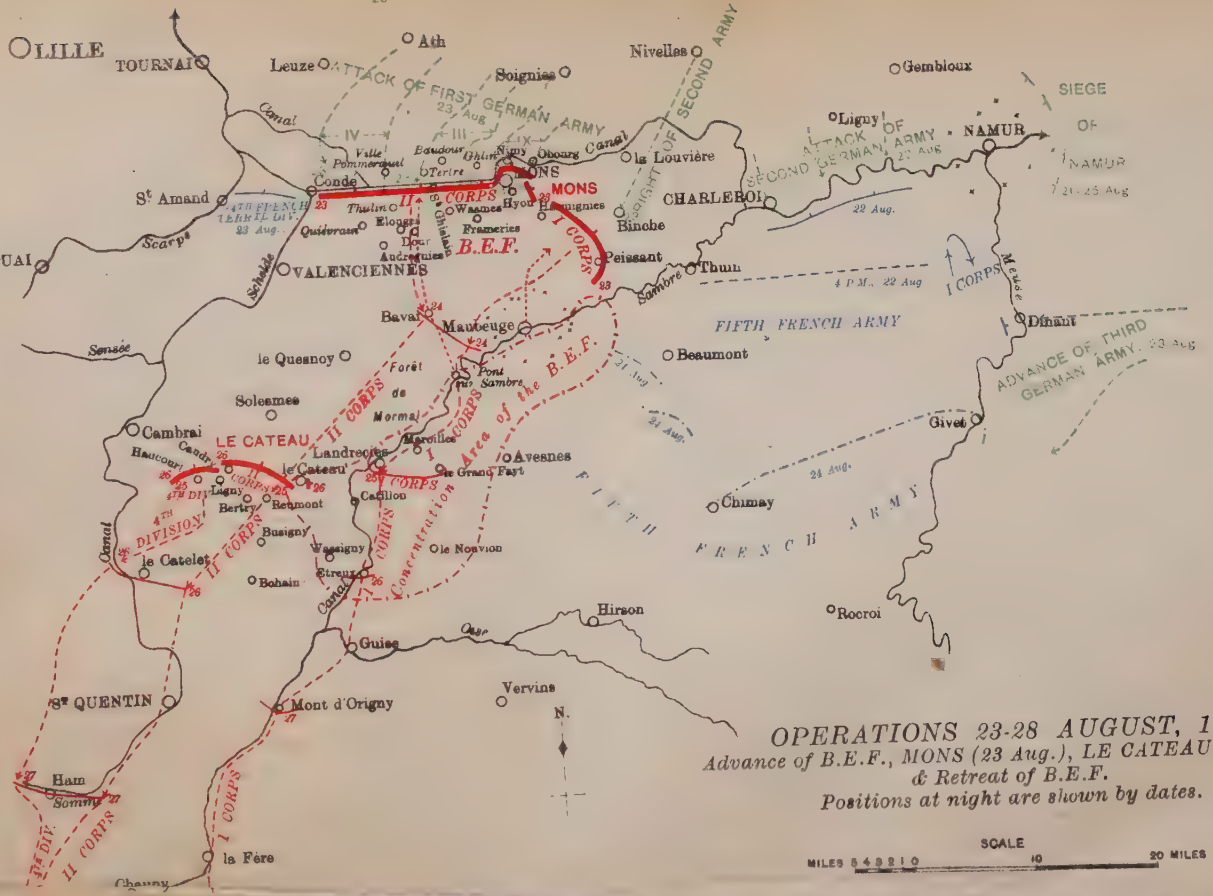


## OPERATIONS 23-28 AUGUST, 1914.

*Advance of B.E.F., MONS (23 Aug.), LE CATEAU (26 Aug.), & Retreat of B.E.F.*

*Positions at night are shown by dates.*

SCALE
MILES 5 4 3 2 1 0 10 20 MILES

SKETCH 3.

despatched General Headquarters from London to Southampton. They crossed to Havre on the 14th, and proceeded by rail early on the 16th, reaching Le Cateau late that night. 14-17 Aug. 1914.

On the 14th August, Sir John French himself, with his party, left London. He arrived at Amiens soon after 9 P.M. An hour later, General Valabrègue's chief staff officer came to report that his group, the 53rd and 69th Reserve Divisions, was entrenching south of the Oise between Vervins and Hirson, as a second line to the French left.

On the following days, 15th, 16th and 17th August, the Commander-in-Chief proceeded to visit, in succession, the French Minister of War at Paris, General Joffre at the Grand Quartier Général at Vitry le François, and General Lanrezac at Fifth Army Headquarters at Rethel. From them he learned in some detail the disposition of the French forces in the angle formed by the Sambre and the Meuse, south-west of Namur. General Lanrezac's Army was then rapidly concentrating in the area south of Charleroi: the I. Corps, on the right, being already massed between Namur and Givet; the head of the III. Corps was at Philippeville, and that of the X. Corps at Bohain, midway between St. Quentin and Le Cateau. The XVIII. Corps was expected to begin arriving in the area between Bohain and Avesnes on the 18th and 19th. General Valabrègue's divisions were in position, as already stated above, south of Avesnes. General Sordet's Cavalry Corps was advancing again, this time north-east, from Charleroi and, if driven back, would pass to the left of the British Army. The task of that Army was to move northward and form the extreme left of the French advance.

Throughout this period, that is to say between the 12th and 17th August, the British troops had been passing across the Channel and disembarking on French soil. All was ready for their reception, and the welcome given to them by the inhabitants was enthusiastic. On the 14th and the following days the troops began to move up by train to the areas of concentration, which were arranged so that the army was assembled in a pear-shaped area between Maubeuge and Le Cateau, about twenty-five miles long from north-east to south-west, and averaging ten miles wide. The cavalry was at the north-eastern end, ready to join hands with the French Fifth Army. Sketch 3.

In detail, the areas were: Map 3.

17-20 Aug. 1914.

Cavalry : East of Maubeuge, Jeumont, Damousies, Cousolre. Divisional Headquarters, Aibes.

II. Corps : East of Landrecies. Headquarters, Landrecies.
3rd Division : Marbaix, Taisnières, Noyelles.
5th Division : Maroilles, Landrecies, Ors.

I. Corps : East of Bohain. Headquarters, Wassigny.
1st Division : Boué, Esqueheries, Leschelles.
2nd Division : Grougis, Mennevret, Hannappes.

The Royal Flying Corps, taking the field in war for the first time, assembled four squadrons, with 105 officers, 755 other ranks, and 63 aeroplanes at the aerodrome of Maubeuge ; it also formed an aircraft park at Amiens.

The concentration was virtually complete on the 20th. One sad incident marred the progress to the scene of action, namely the death of Lieutenant-General Sir James Grierson, commanding the II. Corps, who expired suddenly in the train on the morning of the 17th. Sir John French asked that Sir Herbert Plumer might take General Grierson's place ; but the Secretary of State for War decided to send Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.

On the 19th August, G.H.Q. was informed that the 4th Division would be despatched from England immediately ; and it was settled that the 2/Royal Welch Fusiliers, 1/Scottish Rifles, 1/Middlesex and 2/Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, which had been employed on the Lines of Communication, should be formed into the 19th Infantry Brigade. On the same day the Flying Corps carried out its first reconnaissances from Maubeuge northward towards Brussels, and north-west over Tournai and Courtrai. No large bodies of troops were seen ; and on the 20th the British cavalry was pushed forward as far as Binche on the north without encountering any enemy. But an aerial reconnaissance that day observed a column of troops stretching through Louvain as far as the eye could reach. This was a column of the German *First Army*. Diverting one of his corps (the *III. Reserve*), followed later by the *IX. Reserve Corps* and the equivalent of five divisions,[1] to mask the Belgian forces in Antwerp, von Kluck was pressing westward with the remainder of the *First Army*. On this day, the 20th, his troops entered Brussels. It was a fateful day in many respects, for during its course the main Belgian Army retired into Antwerp, the Germans approached within decisive range of Namur, and General Joffre gave his orders for the general advance.

[1] See footnote, p. 34.

In this great movement, the outline of which has already been given,[1] the British were to advance on the left of the Fifth Army north-east, by way of Soignies, in the general direction of Nivelles. If von Kluck wheeled southward from Brussels, it was not anticipated that his right would extend much beyond Mons. Therefore, if the British were in line about this place, they would be ready, when once General Lanrezac had passed the Sambre, to wheel eastward and envelop the right of the Germans. To make this envelopment the more certain, General Sordet's Cavalry Corps, which had on this day fallen back across the Sambre to Fontaine l'Évêque (midway between Charleroi and Binche), was directed to take position beyond the left of the British. Still further to the west, the three French Territorial divisions, under the command of General d'Amade, were to push gradually forward.[2] 20 Aug. 1914.

## The British Advance

(See Sketch 3; Maps 2, 3, & 5)

The initiative seemed to be passing into the hands of the Germans, and it was urgent to ascertain by aerial and other reconnaissance what use, if any, they were making of it. Meanwhile, in pursuance of General Joffre's plan, G.H.Q. on the evening of the 20th issued orders[3] for a movement northward during the three ensuing days. An attached march table gave the approximate positions to be reached each day. The general effect of these orders when executed would be that on the 23rd August the Army would be aligned on a front, roughly facing north-east, from Estinne au Mont (near Binche) on the south-east to Lens, eight miles north of Mons, on the north-west, with the Cavalry Division on the left, while the 5th Cavalry Brigade, having covered the right flank during the movement, would find itself finally in advance of the right front. The daily moves were to be as follows: Sketch 3. Maps 2 & 3.

The 5th Cavalry Brigade was to proceed on the 21st to the neighbourhood of Binche, the right of the line, and there remain; the Cavalry Division, moving on the left of the 5th Cavalry Brigade, was to march level with it on the 21st, and on the 22nd proceed to Lens, the left of the line,

[1] See p. 38.
[2] For further information as regards General d'Amade's Force, see p. 108.
[3] Appendix 10.

where it would halt astride the road that connects Mons and Ath. Covered by the cavalry, the rest of the Army was to advance.[1]

*On the* 21*st* the II. Corps to the line Goegnies—Bavai; the I. Corps to the line Avesnes—Landrecies.

*On the* 22*nd* the II. Corps north-westward to the line from Mons westward to Thulin; the I. Corps north-eastward to the line Hautmont—Hargnies.

*On the* 23*rd* the II. Corps was to wheel eastwards, the two divisions being one in rear of the other, with its front east of Mons between Spiennes and St. Denis; the I. Corps was to incline north-eastward and come up on the right of the II., on a line from Estinne au Mont westward to Harmignies (immediately south-east of Spiennes).

The morning of the 21st broke thick and misty, rendering aerial reconnaissance impossible until the afternoon. The cavalry moved northwards early, and after reaching Villers St. Ghislain (six miles south-east of Mons) heard that German cavalry was in force five miles to the northward; a patrol which entered Mons found a similar report current there. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade, after crossing the Condé Canal east of Mons, took up a line upon both banks from Maurage to Obourg. Patrols of the 9th Lancers and 4th Dragoon Guards sighted German patrols in the vicinity of the two bridges east of Mons, those of Nimy and Obourg; but contact was not established. Information from peasants, however, pointed to the movement of considerable forces southward from Soignies (ten miles north-east of Mons).

The II. Corps followed the cavalry to a line level with and west of Maubeuge, the 3rd Division, on the right, to the line Bettignies—Feignies—La Longueville, and the 5th Division, on the left, to the line Houdain—St. Waast—Gommegnies. Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien reached Bavai from England at 4 P.M. and took over command of the II. Corps. The outposts of the 9th Infantry Brigade on this evening overlooked the old battlefield of Malplaquet, and were found by the Lincolnshire Regiment which, together with the Royal Scots Fusiliers, had fought in the action under Marlborough, two hundred years before.

The I. Corps simultaneously moved up to the line from Avesnes to Landrecies, about ten miles behind the front of the II., the 1st Division on the right, and the 2nd on

[1] The positions of troops are always given from right to left, unless otherwise stated.

the left. The day was sultry and many of the reservists suffered in consequence; a considerable number were still feeling the effects of inoculation, and all found the hard irregular surface of the cobbled roads extremely trying to march on. In the afternoon the weather cleared and the Flying Corps was able to carry out reconnaissances. It reported a large body of cavalry with some infantry and guns south-east of Nivelles. This intelligence was confirmed, and the formation identified as the German *9th Cavalry Division*, by a British intelligence officer who was in Nivelles when the division entered, but escaped by motor. The presence of two more cavalry divisions was ascertained, one of which, the *2nd*, had been pushed far to the westward, and had reached the line Ghent—Audenarde, being evidently intended to explore the area as far as the sea. The other German cavalry division, supposed to be the *4th*, was between Charleroi and Seneffe.[1] These three cavalry divisions formed the German *II. Cavalry Corps* under General von der Marwitz.[2] The main German line was reported as extending south-east from Grammont, through Enghien, Nivelles, Genappes and Sombreffe to Charleroi. It is now known that from right to left—that is to say from north-west to south-east—the order of the German corps was *IV.* (with *II.* echeloned behind it), *III.*, *IX.*, *VII.*, *X.*, and *Guard Corps*, with four Reserve corps in rear of them. The Allied High Command was correctly informed as to the actual number of German corps in Belgium; but it could only, of course, forecast the scope of the movement in progress: part of von Kluck's cavalry at least, and possibly some of his infantry had begun a wheel south-westwards from Brussels. Whether he intended to continue in that direction or sweep further westwards, it was as yet impossible to judge on the available information. On the British right, General Lanrezac's Army was in contact with infantry of the German *Second Army* along the whole line of the Sambre on either side of Charleroi, from Tamines to Pont à Celles, so that hard fighting in that quarter on the morrow was almost certain. There seemed every chance that it might spread further to the west.

21 Aug. 1914.

Map 5.

At 2.45 P.M. G.H.Q. ordered the cavalry to close the

[1] According to von Kluck, p. 35, it was near Enghien. The identification of the other cavalry divisions was correct.

[2] The corps, after concentrating near Ath, was sent north-westwards towards the coast.

line between the French left and Mons: the 5th Cavalry Brigade to take up a line from the left of General Sordet's Cavalry Corps at Fontaine l'Évêque to Péronnes, in front of Binche, and the Cavalry Division to prolong that line to the Canal at Boussoit (five miles east of Mons) with another brigade, the 3rd. Thence patrols were to be pushed out north and north-east. Operation orders, issued from G.H.Q. shortly before midnight,[1] directed that the march table issued on the 20th should hold good for the 22nd, with two modifications. The outposts of the II. Corps, instead of having their right on Mons, were now to hold an angle with Mons in the apex—that is from Givry north-westward to Nimy and thence westward along the canal to Pommeroeul; and as soon as they had taken this over, the Cavalry Division was to move westward to a position in echelon behind the left, in the area comprised within the triangle Thulin — Quiévrain — Baisieux, with outposts along the line of the Canal from the left of the II. Corps to Condé. The intention still was that the British Army should take the offensive.

[1] Appendices 11 and 12.

# CHAPTER II

## 22nd August 1914

### First Contact with the Enemy

(See Sketch 3; Maps 2, 3, 5, & 6)

At dawn on the 22nd August C Squadron of the 4th Dragoon Guards (2nd Cavalry Brigade) pushed out two officer's patrols from Obourg, on the Canal, north towards Soignies; one of these found a German piquet on the road, fired on it, and drove it off. This was apparently the first shot of the war fired by the British on the continent. Later a troop of the same squadron advanced to meet a body of German cavalry which was moving south along the road from Soignies towards Mons, turned it back near Casteau, and pursued it until checked by fire.[1] The 4th killed three or four of the enemy and captured three more, who proved to belong to the *4th Cuirassiers* of the *9th Cavalry Division*. Further to the east, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade found all clear for two miles north of the Canal within the triangle Gottignies—Roeulx—Houdeng; but here again the peasants reported the enemy to be in strength to the north, at Soignies and north of La Louvière (eleven miles east of Mons). Still further east patrols of the 5th Cavalry Brigade early found contact with the enemy in the direction of La Louvière and reported German troops of all arms to be advancing from the north, and the French to be retiring across the Sambre. General Sordet's 3rd Cavalry Division passed through the British 5th Cavalry Brigade soon after, on its march westward; but it was not until nearly 10 A.M. that a German detachment of all arms[2] came in contact with two squadrons of the Scots Greys (5th Cavalry Brigade), which were holding the bridges over the Samme at Binche and Péronnes,

Maps 2 & 3.

[1] German accounts also record this as the first contact. "Mons," p. 17.

[2] Apparently of the *13th Division*. See p. 61.

facing east. The enemy made little effort to force the passage, though he shelled the Greys heavily but ineffectively, and kept up a fairly accurate rifle fire. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade, in support of the 5th, remained about Bray, two miles in rear, whence D and E Batteries R.H.A. fired a few shells. At 2 P.M. the Greys slowly drew off, having apparently, by sheer superiority of marksmanship, inflicted some thirty or forty casualties at the cost of a single officer wounded. A troop of the 16th Lancers, which had been sent to their support, gave chase to a hostile patrol on the way, and came suddenly upon a party of *Jäger* on the hill immediately to west of Péronnes. The troop rode straight over the *Jäger*, charged through them again on the return journey, at a cost of only one man wounded and three horses killed, and then left them to E Battery R.H.A., which had unlimbered to cover its return. Altogether, the cavalry was heartened by its work on this day, being satisfied that it was superior to the German horsemen, both mounted and dismounted, both with rifle and with sword.

The cumulative effect on the British cavalry commanders of the encounters during the day was the conviction that German infantry in great force was in close support of the German cavalry. They had made reports in that sense on the previous day, and they were now more than ever confirmed in their opinion. Aerial reconnaissance during the forenoon did not tend to shake this view. One aviator landing at Beaumont (about twelve miles east of Maubeuge) to take in petrol, learned from General de Mas-Latrie, the commander of the French XVIII. Corps, that General Sordet, on his march westwards to the left flank of the Allied Armies, had on the 21st encountered German infantry north of the Sambre Canal, and had been compelled to fall back. This accounted for his movement southward to Binche. Later, another British aeroplane (which returned to the aerodrome at 1.10 P.M.) reported the northern part of Charleroi and many other towns and villages near it to be in flames, and on its return westward was fired at by an infantry brigade between Ath and Enghien. A third aeroplane had a similar experience, the observer being wounded. The sum total of these observations was to the effect that brigades of German infantry, probably amounting to a corps in all, filled the roads south of Grammont, that a cavalry division was at Soignies, and that the general front of this corps and

cavalry division extended, facing south-west, from Lessines to Soignies,[1] no part of them being west of the Dendre Canal, excepting a party of mounted troops which had been seen at Peruwelz, immediately to the north of Condé. Their further advance, if the direction was maintained, would bring their left (east) flank to Mons. 22 Aug. 1914.

### Advance of the I. and II. Corps

Meantime, the British I. and II. Corps were advancing. In view of the situation, both corps started an hour and a half before the time that had been originally ordered. The 1st Division, moving at 4 A.M., reached its selected halting places—north and south-west of Maubeuge—at Bettignies, St. Rémi Mal Bâti, Limont Fontaine, between 3 and 5 P.M. But shortly before 3.30 P.M. Sir Douglas Haig received orders for the I. Corps to continue its advance. The result of the morning's reconnaissances had shown G.H.Q. that, if the Cavalry Division were withdrawn, as already ordered, to the left of the line, the 5th Cavalry Brigade would be too weak to cover the large gap between the right of the II. Corps and the left of the French XVIII. Corps on the Sambre, and that consequently the I. Corps must be hurried up to its support. Accordingly, between 5 and 7 P.M. the 1st Division resumed its march, but did not reach its billets until far into the night, the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Brigades entering Villers Sire Nicole and Croix lez Rouveroy, some eight to ten miles south-west of Binche, between 9 and 10 P.M., whilst the 1st (Guards) Brigade on the right did not arrive at Grand Reng until 2 to 3 A.M. on the 23rd. This was a long march, which tried the troops severely. Maps 3 & 5.

About noon the 2nd Division, which had started at 5 A.M., halted in depth at La Longueville, Hargnies, and Pont sur Sambre, which lie on a north and south road passing west of Maubeuge. Its head was thus some six miles south-west of the rear of the 1st Division. The 2nd Division also received orders to resume its march; but the orders were cancelled, since the German advance had apparently ended for the day, and there was no immediate necessity to make such a call on the troops.

The whole movement of the I. Corps was covered on

[1] According to von Kluck the troops in question were, commencing on the west: *IV. Corps*, *III. Corps* and *9th Cavalry Division*.

the west by a flank guard of the Divisional Cavalry, which traversed the Forest of Mormal.

Sketch 3. Map 6. Meanwhile, in the II. Corps, the 3rd Division moved off at 7 A.M., and the 5th, in three columns, at 6 A.M.; the former reached its billets around Mons, in the area Nimy—Ghlin—Frameries—Spiennes, at about 1 P.M., and the latter, on its left, the line of the Mons Canal from Jemappes westward to Bois de Boussu, one or two hours later. The troops again suffered much from the cobbled roads, and the march, though not long, was extremely trying. The first outpost line taken up by the 3rd Division, consequent upon the reports of the engagement of the 5th Cavalry Brigade, was from Givry north-west to the edge of Mons. Later in the afternoon, however, the line was thrown forward in a wide sweep eastwards, through Villers St. Ghislain, St. Symphorien, the bridge at Obourg, and the bridge at Lock 5, to Nimy. The 8th Infantry Brigade took the right of this line, the 9th the left, and the 7th was in reserve some five miles in rear at Frameries and Ciply—the village around which Marlborough's army had bivouacked on the night before the battle of Malplaquet. On the left of the 3rd Division, the 13th Infantry Brigade of the 5th Division occupied the line of the Canal from Mariette to Les Herbières, and the 14th Infantry Brigade from Les Herbières to Pommeroeul. The total front round Mons held by the II. Corps was over twenty miles.

Thus the two corps were approximately in the positions assigned to them in G.H.Q. orders of the 20th August. The I. Corps was only a short distance from its intended position; but the cavalry was now about to move due west, and a wheel of the II. Corps to the north-east up to Lens had still to take place. For the moment the line of the Mons Canal, now held by the outposts of the II. Corps, was the left of the British front, and with the I. Corps' front formed a salient angle, not a straight line.

A huge belt of woodland extended along the whole length of the front north of the Canal, capable of screening the approach of the enemy to within two miles, or even less, of the British piquet line. Around Mons itself the Canal forms a pronounced salient (the "Mons Salient" as it will be called), which was ill-adapted to prolonged and serious defence. On appreciating the situation, 3rd Division Headquarters, which had been warned of the possibility of an attack by German advanced guards, decided that in this quarter the outposts should not be reinforced

in case of attack, and ordered the preparation of second line positions in rear, which will presently be described. Meanwhile, as the II. Corps came up, it became possible gradually to collect the Cavalry Division. Originally it had been intended that the division should move westward at noon, but this, in view of the German menace about Binche, had been considered inadvisable. At 4 P.M., however, General Allenby gave the order to withdraw westward. The main body of the 5th Cavalry Brigade remained near Estinne au Mont (south-west of Binche), leaving the Scots Greys in position at Estinne au Val, a couple of miles to the north-west. At 6.30 P.M. this brigade, having first put the bridges over the Samme into a state of defence, went into billets between Binche and Merbes Ste. Marie. As the Cavalry Division drew off, it was followed by a German airship. After a most painful march westward behind the II. Corps, along some fourteen miles of cobbled street through the dreary squalor of an interminable mining village, it reached its billets at Élouges, Quiévrain and Baisieux, on the left of the Army, between midnight and 3 A.M. of the 23rd. 22 Aug. 1914.

## The Situation at Nightfall

In the course of the afternoon the Flying Corps made further reconnaissances towards Charleroi, and ascertained that at least two German army corps [1]—one of them the *Guard Corps*—and the *Guard Cavalry Division*, were attacking the French Fifth Army on the line of the Sambre. In the evening, the observers returned with very grave news, which was confirmed by the British liaison officer with General Lanrezac and by an officer of the Fifth Army Headquarters sent by that general. The French centre had been driven back, and the French X. Corps had retired to the line St. Gérard (13 miles E.S.E. of Charleroi)—Biesme—Gerpinnes, from five to ten miles south of the river; the French III. Corps had likewise fallen back nearly the same distance, to a line from Gerpinnes westward to Jamioulx; the XVIII. Corps on the left, however, remained in its original position, still echeloned to the rear, between Marbaix and Thuin. General Sordet had moved southward from Binche, and was halting his Cavalry Corps for the night at Bersillies l'Abbaye (9 miles south of Binche), striking well to the rear of the British Army Maps 3 & 5.

[1] *Guard* and *X. Corps* (see Bülow).

before moving west. General Valabrègue's two Reserve divisions were near Avesnes, twenty-five miles south of Mons, preparing to march north-east towards Beaumont—Cousolre, in rear of the gap between the Allied Armies.[1] The British on the Mons Canal, therefore, were some nine miles ahead of the main French line ; and the 1st Division, when it came up to its destination about Grand Reng, would be fully nine miles from the left flank of the French XVIII. Corps. To fill the gap there were no troops available, except the 5th Cavalry Brigade and Valabrègue's two Reserve divisions ; unless we include Sordet's cavalry, which was still in the neighbourhood, though moving fast away from it. Further, nine miles of the British line from the Mons Salient to Rouveroy (9 miles south-east of Mons), was held only by the 8th Infantry Brigade.

The enemy's main bodies were now reported at various points within dangerous proximity. Twenty thousand men of all arms, presumed to be part of the German *VII. Corps*, were known to be moving southward from Luttre, about eight miles north of Charleroi. Thirty thousand more (supposed to be the *IV.* or the *III. Corps*, but actually the *VII.*) were reported about Nivelles, and the *IX. Corps* was bivouacking for the night south-east of Soignies.[2] Yet another large body of all arms, reckoned to be another corps, the *II.*, was moving west through Ladeuse, about five miles south of Ath. Further, the German *9th Cavalry Division* had been identified, with its head at Peruwelz, and other cavalry, probably divisional, was known to be north of Mons. The inhabitants of Les Herbières informed the Scottish Borderers that twelve Uhlans had ridden into their village on the 21st, and that some two hundred Germans were close at hand. Finally an air report was brought into Maubeuge, and at once taken personally to G.H.Q. by Brigadier-General Sir David Henderson, that a long column, estimated at a corps, was moving westward on the Brussels—Ninove road, and at the latter town had turned south-west towards Grammont. This was later identified as the German *II. Corps* of the *First Army*. There were also signs of a strong

[1] See Note on the movements of General Valabrègue's Group at end of Chapter V.

[2] Von Kluck and von Bülow had corps in the positions stated, but the British reports, good though they were, did not on this occasion identify all the corps exactly, thus Kluck's map shows the *VII. Corps* of the *Second Army* marching through Nivelles ; the *III.* and *IV.* were between Soignies and Ath.

force moving down the great chaussée on Soignies; it was endeavouring to hide itself from observation by making use of the trees that bordered the road. 22 Aug. 1914.

As the situation disclosed itself, the British Commander-in-Chief, whilst still hoping that offensive action might be possible, began to realize the necessity, in view of the isolated position of his force, of being prepared for any kind of move, either in advance or retreat. The air report that a corps was moving on the road Brussels—Ninove—Grammont seemed to give warning of a very ambitious enveloping movement to the south-west. In any case von Kluck's advance made it impossible to expect that the British would be able to reach Soignies without opposition. On the evening of the 22nd Sir John French held a conference at Le Cateau, at which the Chief of the General Staff, Sir Archibald Murray, and the G.S.O. in charge of Intelligence, Colonel G. M. W. Macdonogh, were present, with the Brigadier-Generals, G.S. of the I. and II. Corps, and the G.S.O. 1 of the Cavalry Division. The position of the Germans as it was then known was explained and discussed. At the close, the Commander-in-Chief announced his decision that, owing to the retreat of the French Fifth Army, the British offensive would not take place. To a request of General Lanrezac, brought by a staff officer about 11 P.M., that the English should attack the flank of the German columns which were pressing him back from the Sambre, Sir John French felt that it was impossible to accede; but he agreed to remain in his position on the canal for twenty-four hours. At the suggestion of the II. Corps, he ordered the I. Corps to take over by 6 A.M. on the 23rd the portion of the outpost line of the II. Corps which lay east of Mons. Accordingly the 2nd Division which, as we have seen, had remained in its original billets, moved forward at 3 A.M. on the 23rd, but was too late to relieve the II. Corps before fighting commenced.

### German Uncertainty as to the Position of the B.E.F. on 23rd August 1914

From the many sources of information now available, it would appear that the fog of war on the German side, in spite of superiority in aircraft, was very much more intense than on the British.

In the first place, von Kluck laboured under the

misapprehension[1] that the B.E.F. had landed at Ostend, Dunkirk and Calais. The Great General Staff had expected that it would do so;[2] but the measures taken by the French to prevent espionage were so good that no information as to the real landing-places reached the Germans. Thus their accounts say:[3] "As regards the arrival of this "Force [the B.E.F.], the information was unreliable, and as "regards its line of advance, there was none whatever. "Even a message from the Supreme Command dated "20th August, which arrived at *First Army Headquarters* "on the evening of the 21st, ran: 'Disembarkation of the "'English at Boulogne and their employment from direction "'of Lille must be reckoned with. The opinion here, how-"'ever, is that large disembarkations have not yet taken "'place. . . .' It was only on the 22nd August that an "English cavalry squadron was heard of at Casteau, 6 miles "north-east of Mons,[4] and an aeroplane of the English 5th "Flying Squadron which had gone up from Maubeuge was "shot down. The presence of the English on our front "was thus established, although nothing as regards their "strength."

What is more convincing perhaps than even this statement is the opening paragraph of von Kluck's operation orders for the 23rd August,[5] issued at Hal at 8.30 P.M. on the 22nd; all that he could tell his corps commanders was: "A squadron of British cavalry was encountered to-day "at Casteau, north-east of Mons, and a British aeroplane, "coming from Maubeuge, was shot down near Enghien." Von Kluck's uncertainty, however, was still great, and he was so obsessed with the idea that the British would appear on his flank that on 23rd August, the actual day of the battle of Mons, hearing that troops were detraining at Tournai, he halted his Army for two hours—8.30 to 10.30 A.M.—and prepared to wheel westwards. In von Kluck's own words: "A report reached Army Headquarters that a detrainment "of troops had been in progress at Tournai since the "previous day. It seemed therefore not unlikely that strong "British forces were being sent forward through Lille.

[1] Kluck, p. 33. [2] Kuhl, Generalstab, p. 91.

[3] Von Zwehl writing in the Militär Wochenblatt, Nos. 35, 36, 37 and 38 of September 1919, in an article entitled "The Operations of Field Marshal French against the *First Army* and the *VII. Reserve Corps*." Kluck, p. 34, and Bülow, p. 21, also give the Supreme Command message.

[4] This belonged to the 4th Dragoon Guards, as mentioned at the beginning of Chapter II.

[5] Kluck, p. 34.

"The heads of the advanced guards of the corps were 22 Aug.
"therefore halted on the road Leuze—Mons—Binche to 1914.
"enable preparations to be made for the Army to wheel
"westwards. . . . Eventually, however, it was reported
"that only a French infantry brigade was at Tournai, and
"that it was retiring on Lille. The Army, therefore, con-
"tinued to advance."

The German General Staff monograph "Mons" adds that by the detrainment at Tournai "the still unsolved "question as to where the British principal forces would be "met was made yet more difficult to answer. In relation to "the landing-places of the British, their detrainment near "Lille was not unlikely." It continues that, in the course of the forenoon, information as to the presence of the B.E.F. on the Canal became more and more definite. "A captured private letter announced the presence of a "strong British Army south of Mons. The nearest division "of the *Second Army*, the *13th Division*, reported that a "British cavalry brigade had been driven from Péronnes "in a south-westerly direction.[1] . . . In the early morning, "aeroplane reconnaissance had given no results in conse-"quence of the prevailing fog."

On the arrival of the *2nd Battalion* of the *12th Grenadier Regiment* (*III. Corps*), at Baudour, 2 miles north of the Mons Canal, about noon on the 23rd August, the cavalry reported[2] that there was no enemy within fifty miles, and shortly afterwards two Hussars, covered with blood, galloped past shouting that the enemy had occupied the line of the Canal in front. A third limped past, dragging his blood-stained saddle, and reported "in front, in the village, there they are!"

The German General Staff account states that "recon-"noitring parties were unable to reach the bridges [of the "Canal]. Whenever they tried to penetrate between the "numerous widely scattered farms . . . they were received "with fire from invisible riflemen." It was thus in complete ignorance of the strength of the British that von Kluck advanced to the Canal; as he says, there "might have been only cavalry" in front of him.[3]

[1] It was two squadrons of the Royal Scots Greys. See p. 53.

[2] "Bloem," p. 116.

[3] Just as von Bülow on the 22nd August at Charleroi thought that he was only opposed by cavalry and weak infantry detachments when he had the French Fifth Army in front of him. Bülow, pp. 21, 22.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BATTLE OF MONS

#### Description of the Ground

(See Sketches 2 & 3 ; Maps 5, 6, & 7)

Map 6. The ground on which the British Army had taken up its position is a narrow belt of coalfield which extends roughly for rather more than twenty miles westwards from Maurage (six miles east of Mons) along the Mons Canal, and has an average breadth, from the Canal southward, of two miles. South of this belt the country gradually rises to a great tract of rolling chalk downs, cut into by many streams and with numerous outlying spurs. Every inch of this territory has in bygone days seen the passage of British armies; and name after name is found upon British colours, or is familiar in British military history.

On the ground occupied by the I. Corps—that is to say, roughly from Givry northward to Spiennes, thence westward almost to Paturages and thence southward again to Quévy le Petit—the chalk comes to the surface; and there is even a little outcrop of it within the salient or loop of the Canal around Mons. This small area is cut up by wire fences, market gardens, and the other artificial features which form the outskirts of a provincial town; and it is noteworthy that across this tangle of enclosures no fewer than seven different roads diverge from Mons north-east and north-west to as many bridges. At the base of the salient the ground rises gradually from north to south, for fifteen hundred to two thousand yards, till it culminates in three well-marked features. The first of these is Mount Erebus, a round hill immediately to the south of Mons; the second is a great whale-backed hump, about a thousand yards long from north to south, very steep upon every side, except the eastern, and crowned by

two summits, Mont Panisel on the north and Bois la Haut on the south, the whole called by the latter name. The third is the height known as Hill 93, which lies south-east of Bois la Haut and is divided from it by a shallow valley. This last hill was of considerable tactical importance, since from it and from Bois La Haut observation and cross-fire could be brought to bear upon the ground eastward about St. Symphorien. But Bois la Haut was in parts thickly wooded, and consequently from its northern end, where there were hospital buildings, there was little field of fire. 23 Aug. 1914.

West of Mons the line of the Canal is straight, and the actual borders are clear; the ground on both sides of it is cut up by a network of artificial water-courses, chequered by osier-beds, for a breadth of a mile or more. But the opening up of the coal-measures has turned much of the country immediately south of this watery land into the hideous confusion of a mining district. The space occupied by the II. Corps in particular, within the quadrangle Mons—Frameries—Dour—Boussu, is practically one huge unsightly village, traversed by a vast number of devious cobbled roads which lead from no particular starting-point to no particular destination, and broken by pit-heads and colossal slag-heaps, often over a hundred feet high. It is, in fact, a close and blind country, such as no army had yet been called upon to fight in against a civilised enemy in a great campaign.

## The British Dispositions

At 5.30 A.M., the Corps and Cavalry Division commanders met the Commander-in-Chief in the Chateau at Sars la Bruyère, when orders were issued for the outpost line to be strengthened, and for the bridges over the Mons Canal to be prepared for demolition. The conference over, the Field-Marshal, at 9.15 A.M. proceeded to Valenciennes. The 19th Infantry Brigade had just detrained there and was marching to occupy the left flank of the outpost line on the Canal. This would thus extend nearly to Condé, where it was understood from a French Staff officer that Territorial troops would take it up.[1] The local situation, therefore, seemed satisfactory. For the rest, there was intelligence of fighting between German cavalry and French

[1] The 84th Territorial Division subsequently arrived.

Territorial infantry about Tournai, though no information as to its results.

Sketch 3. Map 7. In describing the general disposition of the troops it must be remembered that, as the Army had halted whilst in the course of wheeling or forming to face towards Nivelles, the front of the I. Corps was already turned north-eastward, whereas the II., upon the wheeling flank, still mainly faced to the north. The general front, therefore, formed an obtuse angle, the I. Corps being on the right half of the south-eastern arm, and the II. Corps round the apex and along the western arm. The south-eastern arm from Peissant to Mons was about ten miles long, and the arm along the Canal from Mons to Condé, seventeen miles. The I. Corps was extended, roughly speaking, from the Sambre to the Haine; the 1st Division being on the right, with the 3rd Infantry Brigade in front between Peissant and Haulchin (about four miles); the 1st (Guards) Brigade in rear of its right at Grand Reng and Vieux Reng; and the 2nd Infantry Brigade in rear of its left at Villers Sire Nicole and Rouveroy. The 2nd Division was on its way to take up the line on the left of the 1st Division from Haulchin to Harmignies (another four miles), and meanwhile the vacant place was filled by the 5th Cavalry Brigade. The ground in front of the right of the outpost line of the 3rd Division was commanded by the great bluff of Bois la Haut. This hill was reconnoitred for occupation by the batteries of the XL. Brigade R.F.A., which were billeted immediately behind it at Mesvin, and was secured at night by sending forward the 2/Royal Irish Regiment, of the 8th Infantry Brigade, to connect with the I. Corps at Harmignies, and hold the villages of Villers St. Ghislain and St. Symphorien.

The 1/Gordon Highlanders and 2/Royal Scots of the 8th Infantry Brigade were in position near the Harmignies road from Hill 93 to the north-east corner of Bois la Haut. The front from Bois la Haut northwards to the apex of the Mons Salient, two miles, was held as an outpost line by the 4/Middlesex. Rough entrenchments had been thrown up by them during the afternoon of the 22nd, but were still unfinished when darkness fell. On the left of the 4/Middlesex, the 9th Infantry Brigade held the line of the Canal from the Nimy bridges on the western face of the Mons Salient, as far as the bridge of Mariette, six miles, with the 4/Royal Fusiliers, 1/Royal Scots Fusiliers and 1/Fifth Fusiliers. The remaining battalion, the 1/Lincolnshire, was a mile south-west of Mons at Cuesmes. The 7th

Infantry Brigade was in reserve about Ciply, two miles south of Mons. The rest of the artillery of the 3rd Division was mostly held for the present in reserve—XXIII. Brigade R.F.A. north of Ciply, and XLII. R.F.A., together with the 48th Heavy Battery, at Nouvelles (1½ miles east of Ciply). The XXX. Howitzer Brigade was still on its way from Valenciennes. 23 Aug. 1914.

Passing westward to the 5th Division, the 13th Infantry Brigade was posted, with a three-mile front, on the left of the 9th, the 1/Royal West Kent covering the bridges that span the Canal immediately east of St. Ghislain, with four guns of the 120th Field Battery in close support on the tow-path. On the left of the West Kents, who had dug themselves excellent trenches by the railway bridge, the 2/Scottish Borderers, with the machine guns of the 2/Yorkshire Light Infantry, occupied the Canal up to, but not including, the railway bridge at Les Herbières, with one company entrenched on the road north of that bridge. The two remaining battalions of the 13th Infantry Brigade were held in reserve in St. Ghislain, in rear of the centre of the brigade front.

On the left of the 13th Infantry Brigade, the 14th occupied the line of the Canal from the railway bridge of Les Herbières westward to Pommeroeul road bridge, a front of 2½ miles. The 1/East Surrey were on the right, holding the railway bridge itself, with one company pushed across to the north bank. From the foot bridge south of La Hamaide, the 1/Cornwall Light Infantry prolonged the front to Pommeroeul bridge. Here again a platoon, together with the machine-gun section, was sent across the Canal to form a bridgehead upon the north bank. The machine guns were posted to sweep the straight length of road towards Ville Pommeroeul; but a clear view northward was obstructed by rolling stock on the railway, which crosses the road about a mile to north of the Canal. As the Haine stream, which was unfordable and had few bridges, passed about a mile behind this part of the line, the Cornwall Light Infantry had orders to hold the Canal as an advanced position only, and to retire when necessary to a second position, which the 15th Infantry Brigade was directed to prepare behind the Haine. The 2/Suffolk and 2/Manchester, the remaining battalions of the 14th Infantry Brigade, were in reserve. The 15th Infantry Brigade was divided, part preparing a position on the Haine, with the rest in reserve further to the rear near Dour. From

Pommeroeul westward the 4th Cavalry Brigade was responsible for the two remaining crossing-places east of Condé, at Lock 5 and St. Aybert, until the 19th Infantry Brigade should come up, and these two points were accordingly occupied by the Carabiniers. All troops were warned to expect an attack early next morning.

The selection of positions along the part of the line held by the 5th Division was a matter of the greatest difficulty, the ground being a wilderness of deep ditches, straggling buildings, casual roads and tracks, and high slag-heaps. These last seemed to offer points of vantage, which were generally found to be non-existent when their summits had been explored, as they were commanded by some other slag-heap ; while certain of them, which seemed to promise all that could be desired, were found to be so hot that men could not stand on them. The artillery was more embarrassed even than the infantry : the officers had great difficulty in finding suitable positions for batteries or even for single guns, and were equally at a loss to discover good observation posts. The general policy followed was to push batteries or sections of batteries up to the infantry for close defence, and to keep the mass of the artillery, and particularly the heavy battery, on the left, where the guns could cover all open ground in anticipation of a turning movement round that flank. Altogether, the ground was such as to baffle the most skilful and sanguine of gunners on the British side. Fortunately, on the enemy side, the conditions were almost identical ; and, except on the east, where the ground was more open, the Germans could make little use of their tremendous superiority of numbers ; for they were about to match eight divisions against four, and actually in the infantry fight six against two extended along a front of 13 miles. In fact, the line of the II. Corps was so thin that it was little better than an outpost line, a chain of small groups, lying on the Canal bank, almost invisible, as is shown in a photograph taken by a machine-gun officer during the battle from his flanking gun. Not without good reason was provision made for a retrenchment across the rear of the Salient and for occupying a position in rear of the Canal, roughly Frameries—Wasmes—Dour, should a strong attack develop.

## The First Encounter with the Enemy

### (*a*) *The Salient*

The morning of Sunday the 23rd broke in mist and rain, which, about 10 A.M., cleared off and gave place to fair weather. Church bells rang, and the inhabitants of the villages near the Canal were seen in their best attire going to worship as if war was utterly distant from them. Trains were running towards Mons crowded with the usual holiday makers. The mounted troops of both armies were however early astir. Those of the British 1st and 2nd Divisions, reconnoitring east of Mons towards the bridges of Binche, Bray, Havre and Obourg, soon encountered small parties of the enemy. Near Obourg they were pressed back, and at 6 A.M. the German cavalry exchanged shots with the 4/Middlesex. About the same time, other parties of German horse approached the Royal Fusiliers in the apex of the Salient, and two officers of the German *3rd Hussars*, the corps cavalry of the *III. Corps*, were made prisoners. Another patrol, towards Nimy, came in sight of the Scots Fusiliers, who killed one man, and identified his uniform as that of the cavalry regiment of the *IX. Corps*. Further west, two German patrols were caught in ambush, near Ville Pommeroeul between 6.30 and 7 A.M., and two prisoners were taken, the one a Dragoon, the other a Hussar; this indicated the presence of two more regiments, both of the German *9th Cavalry Division*. The mounted troops of the British 5th Division crossed the Canal near the posts of the Scottish Borderers and of the West Kents; and both battalions pushed a reserve company forward to secure their retreat. That of the West Kents, A Company, advanced to the road-junction south of the village of Tertre; and that of the Scottish Borderers to a pond about half a mile north of Les Herbières road bridge. Each side was feeling for the other in expectation of the coming shock.

23 Aug. 1914.

Sketches 2 & 3; Maps 5 & 7.

There could be little doubt where the first blow would fall. The Germans were completing a wheel from east to south; and immediately opposite to the eastern, or standing flank of von Kluck's Army lay the Mons Salient. Before 9 A.M. German guns were in position on the high ground north of the Canal, and very soon shells were bursting thickly along the whole line of the Middlesex and the Royal Fusiliers. One German battery commander

boldly unlimbered his guns in the open, and began firing at a range of 1,500 yards; but he was speedily compelled to shift his ground by the machine guns of the Middlesex. By 9 A.M. German infantry was pressing on to engage the Middlesex about Obourg and, as the hostile movement from north-east to south-west developed itself, troops, all apparently of the *IX. Corps*, gradually spread around the entire curve of the Salient from Obourg to Nimy. By 10 A.M. the company in Obourg was heavily engaged and, indeed, hard pressed; and, shortly afterwards, the machine-gun section of the Royal Irish joined that of the Middlesex. Meanwhile, the Royal Fusiliers were ceaselessly shooting down Germans, who at first came on in heavy masses, but, being caught by the rapid fire of the Fusiliers in front and by the machine guns of the Middlesex and Royal Irish in flank, soon abandoned this costly method of attack. They then began working across the front in small parties, in order to form for a fresh effort under cover of the woods. The British troops in the Salient had orders to make "a stubborn resistance"; the Middlesex and the Royal Fusiliers, therefore, defended themselves with tenacity, and until past 11 A.M. were still holding their original positions.

### (*b*) *The Canal West of Mons*

Meanwhile, as the southward wheel of von Kluck's Army progressed, the attack gradually spread westward along the line of the Canal. The right of the German *IX. Corps* did not appear to extend beyond Nimy;[1] and it was not until 11 A.M. that the *III. Corps*, which was next to the right of it, came into action about the bridge of Jemappes, 2 miles west of Mons. German shells fell in Jemappes itself, in rear of the Scots Fusiliers; but the infantry almost simultaneously advanced in heavy lines. The forward post of the Scots Fusiliers north of the Canal was thereupon withdrawn, and, as the Germans came nearer, they were met by a fire of rifles and machine guns which effectually checked their progress. After a pause they came on again, taking shelter behind the northern bank of the Canal, and actually closed to within 200 yards of the bridge at Lock 2, west of Jemappes, but were compelled by the accuracy of the British fire once more to fall back.[2]

[1] This is now known to be correct (see Sketch 3 in "Mons").

[2] Hauptmann (Professor) Heubner, of the *20th Infantry Regiment, 5th Division, III. Corps*, who witnessed the attack at Jemappes, in his

At Mariette, 3½ miles west of Mons, still in the 9th Infantry Brigade area, German shells found the bridge immediately, and a column of infantry in fours came swinging down a country road immediately east of it. It was promptly stopped by the fire of a small party, under a corporal, which occupied a house in the angle between this road and the waterway. The enemy then tried an advance down the main road; but this had been obstructed by a wire entanglement immediately north and west of the bridge, and by a barricade immediately south of it; and the Fifth Fusiliers were well and skilfully disposed, under good shelter, on both flanks of the road, both in advance and in rear of the bridge. Under a withering fire from three sides, the Germans pressed on to the wire, only to be brought to a standstill there, and then driven back with heavy loss. 23 Aug. 1914.

They now brought up two field guns within half a mile of the Canal, and opened fire with high-explosive shell upon the defenders of the bridge; not without effect, for a shell bursting in the occupied house on the east side of the road killed the whole of the little garrison. But, instead of grey-coated soldiers, a number of little Belgian girls came down the road, and the Fifth Fusiliers naturally ceased their fire.[1] Thereupon, the Germans swarmed forward and, flooding over to the western side of the main road, were able to establish themselves within 200 yards of the Canal, whence they could bring an oblique fire to bear upon the defenders of the barricade. The advanced party of the Fifth on the north side of the bridge was then withdrawn; but the Germans were still far from being masters of the passage of the Canal at Mariette; and the Fifth Fusiliers for the present held their own with no great difficulty and without serious loss.

Further to the left in front of St. Ghislain, A Company of the West Kents, at the cross roads south of Tertre, which was in support of the 5th Divisional Mounted Troops, was warned by the cyclists of the advance of the enemy in

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book "Unter Emmich vor Lüttich, Unter Kluck vor Paris," pp. 69 and 74, speaks of the "numerous wounded" of the regiment which attempted to storm the railway and factory; and at the end of the day says "that they [the English], in any case, fought bravely and obstinately is proved by the heavy losses that our German troops suffered here."

[1] Evidence of Captain B. T. St. John, commanding the company of the Fifth Fusiliers which held Mariette Bridge. It is not suggested that the enemy drove them deliberately in front of him. In many cases inhabitants were caught between the two hostile lines.

force. This company had found a fair field of fire ; but the line of retreat to the Canal was difficult, the ground being cut up by many deep ditches and barbed wire fences. As far as time permitted, passages were cut through the wire, so that during its retirement the company might not mask the fire of the main body on the Canal ; but the preparations were scarcely completed before a small party of the cyclists came at top speed down the road from Tertre and reported that the Germans had brought up guns to drive them from the village. The leading German infantry regiment, the *Brandenburg Grenadiers* of the *5th Division* of the *III. Corps*, had, in fact, moved southward upon Tertre from Baudour, and the Fusilier battalion, which was at its head, had encountered considerable resistance from the cyclists. Five minutes after this alarm had reached the West Kent company (that is to say at about 11.10 A.M.), this Fusilier battalion debouched from Tertre and moved southward, the bulk of the men being in massed formation on the eastern side of the road to St. Ghislain, with parties in extended order upon either flank. They were met by a shattering fire of rifles and machine guns, and were seen to suffer heavily. The commander of the German regiment then made a regular attack with the support of artillery, deploying his two remaining battalions to the right and left of the Fusiliers. By the German account, the Brandenburgers suffered some loss in the village of Tertre from the British artillery, presumably from the guns of the 120th Battery on the Canal. Meanwhile the company commander received a message from the divisional cavalry, a squadron of the 19th Hussars, which had gone out in the direction of Hautrage, north-west of Tertre, asking him to cover its retirement ; and accordingly he clung to his position, while three German battalions, a German battery and a German machine-gun company all came into action against him. The pressure soon became so strong that he began gradually to withdraw by succession of platoons, the men behaving with the greatest steadiness and firing with great effect as the enemy came within closer range. The rearmost platoon, in fact, fought its way out with the Germans within a hundred yards of it in front and upon both flanks. Eventually about half of the company rejoined their comrades on the Canal, the remainder having been killed or wounded, and left, inevitably, to fall into the enemy's hands. This latter was the fate of the company commander, Captain Lister,

and of one of his subalterns; but his men had made a magnificent fight and inflicted far heavier losses than they received. 23 Aug. 1914.

Having cleared this advanced party out of their way, the *Brandenburg Grenadiers*, covered now by the fire of four or five field batteries, swarmed forward over the maze of wire fences and boggy dykes against the main positions of the West Kents and the Scottish Borderers on the Canal. The four guns of the British 120th Battery were soon compelled to withdraw, apparently about noon;[1] though, later on, the remaining section found a position upon a slag-heap, further to the south and east, and came into action with considerable effect. But the positions of the British infantry were so well chosen and concealed that the German artillery failed to discover them, and hence the progress of the German infantry was both slow and costly. In any case, the attack upon the bridge of St. Ghislain was stopped while still three hundred yards distant from the Canal by the accurate fire of the West Kents and the machine guns of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, and the half company of the Scottish Borderers, on the left of the bridge, who all alike had excellent targets, and took advantage of them to the full, with little loss to themselves. The Germans imagined that they were everywhere opposed by machine guns only, not realizing the intensity of British rapid fire.[2]

Meanwhile in the 13th Infantry Brigade area, towards noon, the attack spread westward to the bridges of Les Herbières, where the *52nd Infantry Regiment* contrived, with great skill, to pass men by driblets over the road into the reedy marshes alongside the Canal, and even to send one or two machine guns with them. Reinforcements of the 2/Duke of Wellington's and 2/Yorkshire Light

[1] See p. 65.

[2] A full and dramatic account of the attack of the *Brandenburg Grenadier Regiment* is given in "Vormarsch," by Walter Bloem, the novelist, who was, as a reserve officer, commanding one of the companies. He states that he lost all five of his company officers and half his men. The battalion commander said to him in the evening, "You are my sole and only support . . . you are the only company commander left in the battalion . . . the battalion is a mere wreck, my proud, beautiful battalion!" And the regiment was "shot down, smashed up—only a handful left." Bloem adds, "Our first battle is a heavy, unheard of heavy, defeat, and against the English, the English we laughed at." The regiment was withdrawn a quarter of a mile as soon as it was dark, and spent an anxious night, for, as the colonel said, "if the English have the slightest suspicion of our condition, and counter-attack, they will simply run over us."

Infantry were called up about 2 P.M. in closer support of the Scottish Borderers, and the former suffered a few casualties from shell fire, but their services were not required, for the German attack had already come to a standstill.

At the railway bridge of Les Herbières the Germans—of the *6th Division* of the *III. Corps*—began by bringing a machine gun into action in a house about half a mile from the barricade put up by the East Surreys (14th Infantry Brigade). This was instantly silenced by one of the East Surreys' machine guns; the enemy, thereupon, searched all the houses round the railway bridge with shell, in the hope of locating it. Then the Germans tried to push forward in small columns, which were stopped short by rifle and machine-gun fire, which also dispersed a group of German staff officers a thousand yards away and further to the east. The enemy then plied the East Surreys' defences with shrapnel and machine-gun fire for half an hour, causing no casualties, but disabling one machine gun; after which, about 1.30 P.M., he attacked with two battalions of the *52nd* in mass, advancing across the open at a range of six hundred yards. Such a target was all that the British could wish for; another company of the East Surreys had by this time joined the one astride the embankment; and three platoons of the Suffolks had also come up to cover their left flank, and their rapid rifle fire, combined with long bursts at selected objects from the remaining machine gun at the barricade, mowed down large numbers of the enemy and scattered the rest. At this point, therefore, the Germans were decisively repulsed with very heavy loss, and with trifling casualties to the East Surreys.

Thus far, to a point 7 miles west of Mons, the German attack had spread during the forenoon and the early afternoon; the infantry of the *III. Corps* did not extend further westward, while that of the *IV. Corps* had not yet had time to complete its wheel to the south, so that the 1/Cornwall L.I. at Pommeroeul had not yet come into action.

### Front of the I. Corps

Map 7. Throughout the forenoon and the early afternoon, that is to say, until 2 P.M., all had remained quiet opposite the I. Corps, which it will be remembered faced north-east. Between 11 A.M. and 12.30 P.M. the 2nd Division

had reached its destination, and the 6th Infantry Brigade took position on the left of the corps between Vellereille le Sec and Harmignies, with the 4th (Guards) Brigade in rear of it about Harveng, and the 5th still further to the rear at Genly and Bougnies. The 3rd and 6th Infantry Brigades therefore now held the front of the I. Corps. About 2 P.M. German guns at some point between Binche and Bray, 3½ miles to the north-east, opened fire upon the ridge of Haulchin, against the left of the 3rd Infantry Brigade; and about half an hour later German cavalry[1] was seen moving across the British front north-west from Bray towards St. Symphorien. The 22nd and 70th Field Batteries, which were unlimbered about Vellereille le Sec, were able to shell these parties with good effect, but in return were heavily shelled by batteries which they were unable to locate. The 4th (Guards) Brigade was pushed forward to extend the line of the 6th from Harmignies north-west along the road to Mons; and various battalions, coming under artillery fire in the course of the afternoon, suffered a few casualties. But heavy firing could be heard to the north about Mons; and about 3 P.M. a message from Major-General Hubert Hamilton reported a serious attack on the 3rd Division, and asked for assistance. Though the situation on the right of the I. Corps was not yet clear, for the Germans were still shelling the 3rd Infantry Brigade severely, General Haig directed that two battalions of the 4th (Guards) Brigade should take over the defence of Hill 93 from the 3rd Division, and thus afford it some relief. The news brought in by the 1st and 2nd Divisional Cavalry at 3 P.M., that the French east of the I. Corps had been obliged to fall back a little, might well cause some anxiety; but the more pressing danger lay on the left of the I. Corps in the vicinity of Mons. In every other sector of the line the British were holding their own with ease, and were punishing all attempts to force the passage of the Canal with considerable severity; but in the Salient, the weakest and most critical point of the line, the situation was not equally satisfactory. 23 Aug. 1914.

### Progress of the Fight in the Salient

We left the 4/Middlesex of the 8th Infantry Brigade, and the 4/Royal Fusiliers of the 9th between 11 A.M. and noon stubbornly contesting every inch of ground from Map 7.

[1] Now known to be the *16th Dragoons* (see "Mons").

Obourg to Nimy, north-east of Mons. Brigadier-General B. Doran (8th Infantry Brigade) had early given orders to the 2/Royal Irish, whose companies had covered the ground in front of Hill 93 and Bois la Haut during the night, to assemble north of the latter hill, and by noon the entire battalion was collected there. Just about that time, the Middlesex at Obourg, finding that the Germans were getting in rear of them, began to fall back westward through the Bois d'Havre, the wood just south of Obourg. Simultaneously the Germans began to shell the main line of the 8th Infantry Brigade, south-east of Mons, with shrapnel, but very inaccurately, for they could not see the position of the Royal Scots along the Harmignies—Mons road, and the majority of the Gordon Highlanders were hidden from view. Their infantry then advanced by rushes obliquely across the front of these two battalions, heading for Hill 93 and offering excellent targets. The rifles of both battalions were soon effectively employed, whilst the machine guns of the Royal Scots, thrown slightly forward in a quarry about the centre of the line, poured in a deadly enfilade fire. The 49th Battery also contributed to the enemy's discomfiture by firing shrapnel from Bois la Haut. To be brief, in this quarter the enemy was brought to a standstill three hundred yards from the British trenches.

Within the Salient the conditions were very different. The Germans shortly after noon succeeded in passing the Canal west of Obourg, and in reaching the railway; then, taught by hard experience, they abandoned massed formation and advanced in extended order. At 12.30 P.M. the Royal Irish were ordered to reinforce the Middlesex and, moving off under heavy fire of artillery and machine guns in the direction of Hill 62, deployed on the left of the Middlesex. It was nearly 1.30 P.M. before they reached their position, for they were always under a storm of German shells, without any support from the British artillery. Anything in the nature of a local counter-attack to relieve the Middlesex was out of the question, owing to wire fences and other obstacles. Far from gaining ground, the Royal Irish could only just hold their own. They now shifted their machine guns, which had previously been massed with those of the Middlesex, to the extreme right of their own front. They had not long been there when a body of Uhlans debouched from a wood about six hundred yards east of them, and was instantly met by

fire from both rifles and machine guns. The German horsemen turned about but, as they retired, were caught in flank by the fire of some of the Middlesex falling back from Obourg. This, however, though satisfactory, was but a trifling incident. The *IX. Corps* was attacking in earnest; and it was for the Royal Irish and the Middlesex to maintain a "stubborn resistance." 23 Aug. 1914.

The situation of these two battalions was precarious in the extreme, for they were not, as were the Royal Scots, in a well concealed position which the German artillery could not exactly locate, and with a good field of fire before them. On the contrary, their ground was under good observation from the heights on the north of the Canal; and the German batteries,[1] having complete ascendancy, kept them under heavy fire. Under the protection of this fire, the German infantry slowly gained ground by sheer weight of numbers, but not without loss. Shortly after 2 P.M. the machine-gun section of the Royal Irish tried to come into action on the road about three hundred yards north of Bois la Haut, but one gun was at once disabled and had to be abandoned. Returning to the original position, the remaining gun again came into action, but called down upon itself a concentrated fire of guns and machine guns, which disabled it immediately and killed or wounded every man of the section. The machine guns of the Middlesex were also in trouble, for the Germans had brought up at least six of these weapons against them, and the officer in command of the section had been wounded, though he still remained in charge of his men. By 3.15 P.M. the German infantry, in great force, was within a furlong of the Royal Irish and working round both flanks; and then, after consultation with Colonel Hull of the Middlesex, Major St. Leger who was in command decided to withdraw the Royal Irish some fifteen hundred yards southward to the northern slopes of Bois la Haut. The right of their line moved first; meanwhile the remainder were collected into two bodies: one by Colonel Hull on the northern slopes of the hill, and the other at its north-eastern corner. The latter helped greatly to cover the retreat, which was conducted methodically and in good order; and the battalion finally rallied on the left of the left company of the Gordons whose line now extended almost to the cross roads north

[1] Of the *18th Division* between St. Denis and Masières, 3 miles north-east of Mons.

of Bois la Haut, the time being then about 4 P.M. The shelling was still very heavy, and the cross roads themselves were swept by machine guns from the east, though some buildings at that point and the ground west of the cross roads gave some protection from bullets. A section of the 49th Battery unlimbered on the left of the Royal Irish and, though greatly exposed, gave them some support.

The Middlesex fell back about the same time as the Royal Irish, between them and the 9th Infantry Brigade in Mons, though, being more widely extended, they were less easily re-formed. One company, on leaving the Bois d'Havre, which lies south of Obourg, entered the deserted rifle pits of the Royal Irish and there for a time stood fast. But the retreat of both battalions was facilitated by the fate of the first German attack upon the hill of Bois la Haut itself. This attack was opened by about a company of German infantry, which, with scouts in front of it, emerged gradually from a wood against the left centre company of the Gordons. The Highlanders allowed the scouts to advance and held their fire until greater numbers appeared; then they opened rapid fire at five hundred yards' range, and in a few minutes stopped the attack with heavy loss. Thereby a short respite was gained, which enabled the retiring battalions to settle down in their new positions.

Meanwhile, at 2 P.M. the Royal Fusiliers, in obedience to Brigadier-General Shaw's (9th Infantry Brigade) orders, withdrew southwards from Nimy, the supporting companies covering the retirement of the advanced companies with peacetime precision. Their losses did not greatly exceed one hundred; and after re-forming in Mons the battalion moved southward again to Ciply.[1] The Lincolnshire had been employed since noon in barricading the three roads that lead from Mons to the south, but the Germans did not follow the Royal Fusiliers very closely; and when they at last tried to debouch by the main road from Mons, they were met by a destructive fire from the Lincolnshire at the barricade and by a few shells from the 109th Battery at close range. Unable to make any progress, they turned westward, leaving the Lincolnshire to retire

[1] Lieut. M. J. Dease (who died of wounds) and Private S. F. Godley of the 4/Royal Fusiliers were awarded the Victoria Cross for the manner in which they fought the machine guns. All the men of two crews were killed or wounded.

at their leisure by Mesvin upon Nouvelles, 3 miles south of Mons. 23 Aug. 1914.

## The Line of the Mons Canal West of the Salient

About 3 P.M. the Scots Fusiliers (9th Infantry Brigade) likewise fell back by order, through Jemappes upon Frameries, 3 miles from the Canal; but here, since the bridge had not been destroyed, the Germans followed hard after, and there was sharp fighting along the road and among the slag-heaps north of Frameries. Some of the Fusiliers, firing from the houses, used their weapons with special effect; but two companies, which were entangled among the slag-heaps, suffered much from machine guns which the Germans had instantly brought forward, and for a time were in serious difficulties, the ground being most unfavourable either for defence or for the co-operation of artillery. About 4 P.M., however, the two supporting companies of the Fifth Fusiliers, the left of the 9th Infantry Brigade, whose orders to retire from Mariette had reached them rather late, struck in from the west upon the flank of the Germans, and, after some fighting, enabled the Scots Fusiliers to extricate themselves and to re-form within the village. The German guns were sufficiently far advanced to shell the position of the South Lancashire (7th Infantry Brigade), a mile north of Frameries, but only one or two small parties of infantry approached it. The forward companies of the Fifth Fusiliers meanwhile stuck to their position on the Canal, in spite of the command to retire, in order to cover the Engineers who were preparing the bridge of Mariette for destruction. Despite the extraordinary coolness and gallantry of Captain Wright,[1] who swung himself forward, hand over hand, under the bridge to connect the charges, the work could not be effected, though he made a second attempt after being wounded in the head. It was not until 5 P.M. that the withdrawal of the Sappers, after collecting all their gear, permitted these two companies of the Fifth to retire towards Frameries; but the Germans made no effort to press them and, in fact, did not immediately cross the bridge. Map 7.

[1] The late Captain T. Wright, R.E., received the Victoria Cross for this service. Lance-Corporal C. A. Jarvis, 57th Field Company, R.E., also received it for working 1½ hours under heavy fire and successfully firing the charges at Jemappes bridge.

Further to the left, the 13th Infantry Brigade still held its position on the Canal, though the fire of the German artillery steadily increased in the course of the afternoon. The enemy, in fact, pushed forward three batteries to within twelve hundred yards of the Canal about St. Ghislain, and smothered the 13th Infantry Brigade with shells, but did remarkably little damage. Indeed, it was not until the Germans, about 6 P.M., brought up guns within close range and destroyed the barricade over Les Herbières road bridge that the Scottish Borderers withdrew to the southern bank, the 17th Field Co. R.E. blowing up the bridge behind them. The railway bridge was blown up at the same time; and this was the signal for the destruction of the road bridge near La Hamaide, further west, covered by the East Surreys (14th Infantry Brigade), who thereupon withdrew their advanced parties north of the Canal. The battalion then retired by alternate companies to the position ordered near Thulin, south of the Haine. Nevertheless in this quarter, the Germans were unable to make the slightest progress, and, indeed, at dusk the West Kents were still holding their position north of the Canal.[1] On the left of the East Surreys the Cornwall Light Infantry were left wholly undisturbed until 4.45 P.M. when a mass of German cavalry coming down the road from Ville Pommeroeul was driven back headlong by machine-gun and rapid rifle fire. Immediately afterwards, the advanced parties were recalled to the southern bank of the Canal; the bridge was then blown up by the 59th Field Co. R.E., and all fell back across the Haine to the second position.

On the extreme left, the 19th Infantry Brigade relieved the Cavalry Division between 2 and 3 P.M., the 1/Middlesex and the Cameronians taking up the line to Condé. Soon after 5 P.M. an attack was made upon Lock 5, when the enemy contrived to mount a machine gun in a house commanding the buildings. The lock bridge was therefore blown up, but the 1/Middlesex, though they abandoned the buildings, continued to hold their own without difficulty and with trifling loss.

### The Salient

Map 7. Such, therefore, was the condition of affairs west of the Salient whilst the 2/Royal Irish and 4/Middlesex were

[1] See footnote 2, p. 71.

defending their second position north of Bois la Haut; the facts most important to them were, that the Germans, in consequence of the retirement "by order" of the 9th Infantry Brigade, were defiling through Mons, though checked for a time at its southern border, and had nearly reached Frameries, 3 miles south-west of the town. About 5 P.M. the main body of the Royal Irish was again forced to retire. By that time those of the Middlesex who had occupied the rifle pits of the Royal Irish were overwhelmed by the attacking swarms of Germans, many of their rifles being so much clogged with sand as to be useless. Then came the turn of their machine-gun section which, with the water boiling furiously in the jackets of the guns, fired away its last rounds of ammunition into the masses of the enemy, and was then overpowered. Having no other position in rear that offered any field of fire, the main body of the Royal Irish re-formed west of the northern end of Bois la Haut, their withdrawal being assisted by the left company of the Gordons. Here the 4/Middlesex passed through them and, taking the first road to the westward, marched towards Hyon ($\frac{1}{4}$ mile west of Bois la Haut) on their way to Nouvelles, their place in the second position. The Royal Irish started back along the same road, but had not proceeded far before they found the enemy ahead of them little more than a hundred yards away. Cramped between the steep slope of Bois la Haut and a tangle of buildings on the other side of the road, deployment was impossible; and the battalion was obliged to turn northward and to work round the hill to its south-eastern angle. Here the guns of the 6th Battery, expecting an attack every minute, were disposed in a semi-circle, and the Royal Irish, together with a platoon of the Gordons which was acting as escort to the battery, entrenched themselves about the guns, facing north, west, and south. The enemy followed them up, but, being in no great strength, did not venture to attack. 23 Aug. 1914.

Meanwhile, the 23rd Battery had received orders to retire from the summit of Bois la Haut, and selected as its route a sunken lane leading due south into the main road to Hyon. Proceeding that way, the head of the battery had reached a point within a hundred yards of the main Hyon road, when the leading teams and drivers were all shot down by German infantry, who had come through Mons and were hidden behind a barricade at right angles to the end of the lane. The gunners went forward

to engage the enemy with rifles, and, being joined by the battery escort of the Gordon Highlanders, drove the Germans back into Hyon with some loss. The enemy's barricade was then occupied, and a second barricade thrown up a little east of it; some adjoining buildings were placed in a state of defence; and, while all ranks gave themselves to the task of clearing the lane, the major in command of the battery went off to find Brigadier-General B. Doran (8th Infantry Brigade). Although the light had now begun to fail, the 23rd Battery was still in an unenviable situation. Moreover, the Germans seemed bent upon pinning the 8th Infantry Brigade to its ground, for between 7 and 8 P.M. they launched a general attack, without any preliminary bombardment, against the whole front of the Gordons and Royal Scots along the Harmignies—Mons road. The attenuated line of the Royal Scots had since 4 P.M. been reinforced by two companies of the Irish Rifles from the 7th Infantry Brigade, and the entire front blazed into a burst of rapid fire, which cut the Germans down by scores and brought them instantly to a complete standstill.[1] The enemy then drew off, but some of them assembling about the cross roads north-east of Bois la Haut, were dispersed anew by the fire of the little party of the Royal Irish installed there. Still, the general situation of the 8th Infantry Brigade was insecure; the enemy, as he had just demonstrated, was in force on its front, and in its rear parties had penetrated through Mons as far as Hyon.

### The Situation at Nightfall

Map 7. For the better understanding of the general position of the British, it will be as well to review their line from the Salient westward, as it stood at nightfall. Of the 3rd Division, the position of the 8th Infantry Brigade has just been described; it was the apex of the new front. The 7th and 9th Infantry Brigades were entrenched on its left between Nouvelles and Frameries three miles from the Canal; and the guns had been withdrawn from Erebus to the vicinity of Frameries for the night. Of the 5th Division, on the left of the 3rd, in the 13th Infantry Brigade the West Kents were still in their position on the Canal, with orders to retire three miles south-east to Wasmes at midnight. They had lost little more than a hundred men;

[1] The *75th Regiment* lost 5 officers and 376 men in this attack. See "Mons," pp. 33, 34.

and from five to six hundred yards to their front the *Brandenburg Grenadiers*, who had suffered heavy loss, had entrenched themselves in the marshy meadows on the north bank. On the left of the West Kents, the Scottish Borderers had just withdrawn their advanced companies from the north of the Canal, and had repulsed, with great slaughter, an attempt of the Germans to debouch in mass from a wood opposite the left of their main line. The bridges over the Canal on their front had been blown up, and the Scottish Borderers were also preparing to march to Wasmes, some of the Yorkshire Light Infantry coming forward to cover the movement. There was no sign of any pursuit by the Germans, though the demolished bridge was not impassable for an enterprising enemy. Opposite Les Herbières the East Surreys and the remainder of the 14th Infantry Brigade had joined, or were in the act of joining, the Cornwall Light Infantry in the second position south of the Haine. Here the enemy, after suffering severely while passing the Canal from the machine guns of the Cornwall Light Infantry and the Manchesters, was firing away an immense amount of ammunition with very little result. On the extreme left, the 19th Infantry Brigade was still in position on the bank of the Canal. 23 Aug. 1914.

Thus it will be observed that there was no uniformity of movement from the outpost line on the Canal to the main position in rear; the characteristic obstinacy of the British infantry, which has always fought on without much regard to what was happening in other parts of the field, was thus early made manifest, in spite of the efforts of the Staff to co-ordinate the withdrawal. The 13th Infantry Brigade did not attempt to retire until night, though the brigades to the right and left of it fell back in the afternoon. The 19th Infantry Brigade also stood fast. As a result of the retirement of the two divisions from the outpost line on the Canal to the position south of Mons, the left of the 3rd Division remained as heretofore on the road between Frameries and Cuesmes, but the right of the 5th Division extended no further than to the road from Quaregnon to Paturages; and between the inner flanks of the divisions there was a gap, almost entirely covered by houses, of some two miles. This gap had been foreseen by II. Corps Headquarters, and more than one message passed early in the afternoon between it and G.H.Q. and the Staff of the I. Corps with reference to using the 5th Infantry Brigade to fill it, as this brigade was close at hand

in reserve near Genly, in rear of Frameries. As a first measure, General Smith-Dorrien ordered the 1/Bedfords from the 15th Infantry Brigade to Paturages, and, later on, three battalions of the 5th Infantry Brigade arrived from the I. Corps, in compliance with his request. Two battalions of the 4th (Guards) Brigade had moved up late in the evening to Hill 93, and were in touch with the Royal Scots, thus completing the junction between I. and II. Corps. The only thing that still remained in doubt was the fate of part of the 8th Infantry Brigade and the artillery with it. At 9 P.M. orders were issued by Brigadier-General B. Doran to fall back to the new position at Nouvelles. The party of the Royal Irish at the cross-roads, having clung to their little stronghold till 10 P.M., joined the Gordons, bringing with them one of the battalion machine guns, which had been repaired from the wreck of the other. The 6th Battery guns were man-handled to the foot of Bois la Haut; and the teams were then hooked in, and two temporarily abandoned 18-pdrs. were also brought away. These guns and the Royal Irish were the first to move off, about 11 P.M., and meanwhile the 23rd Battery had been working hard to clear the lane and extricate its guns. Soon after dark a strong German patrol was driven off, with loss, from the barricade; and by 10 P.M. the road was free and the battery ready to march. Shortly afterwards the battery commander returned, having walked through some German troops, and by his orders the battery drove off as noiselessly as possible—the Germans being within three hundred yards of it—eastward to the Beaumont road and thence, by Spiennes, to Nouvelles. At midnight the Gordon Highlanders marched off, the Royal Scots opening fire to drown the tramp of men and the clatter of vehicles; and the 23rd Battery overtook them on their way. The Royal Scots then withdrew, company by company, and before 3 A.M. on the 24th the whole of the 8th Infantry Brigade, together with the three batteries attached to it, was safe in Nouvelles. The casualties of the Royal Scots and Gordons had been trifling; but those of the Royal Irish and of the 4/Middlesex exceeded three hundred and four hundred, respectively.

Altogether, the British commanders were not ill-satisfied with the day's work. The unsatisfactory position on the Canal had been imposed upon them fortuitously; but it had been held for a sufficient time, and had been evacuated, without great difficulty or disaster, in

favour of a second position only a mile or two in rear. The men, too, were in high spirits, for they had met superior numbers of the most highly renowned army in the world and had given a good account of themselves. The casualties of the British amounted to just over sixteen hundred of all ranks, killed, wounded and missing. The whole of these, except forty, were sustained by the II. Corps, and practically half of them by two battalions of the 8th Infantry Brigade in the Salient.[1] The only loss of artillery was that of two guns of the 120th Battery, which could not be removed from their exposed position on the Canal at St. Ghislain. 23 Aug. 1914.

The general result of the action was that the German advance was delayed a whole day. Von Kluck's orders for the 23rd August directed the *III.* and *IV. Corps* to "occupy the rising ground on the southern side of the Canal," whilst the *IX. Corps* was to advance via Mons to the north and north-western front of Maubeuge. The positions prescribed for the 23rd were actually the limits of advance on the 24th, as will be seen.

A German general has summed the action up in these words :[2]

"The German First Army was so near to Field Marshal French that there was some rear-guard fighting on and south of the canal, particularly near Mons. This only slightly delayed the English retirement, but cost the Germans some losses."

Judged by the units whose casualties are now known, the losses must have been very heavy. And this is confirmed by the behaviour of the Germans as it grew dusk. The success in the Salient against the 8th Infantry Brigade was not exploited. No enemy appeared elsewhere either to take advantage of the gaps that presented themselves in the British line or to embarrass the retirement. As at the close of a manœuvre day, German bugles, to the astonishment of the British troops near the Canal, were heard to sound the "cease fire," repeating it along the line unit by unit, and then, after some little singing at one place, all was quiet. But the enemy showed his nervousness and fear of a night attack by the constant discharge

[1] It may be of interest to note that the strength of the 3rd and 5th Divisions, those principally engaged at Mons, was just under 36,000 ; the strength of the British Army at the battle of Waterloo was 31,585 (Wellington Despatches, xii. pp. 485-7).

[2] Lieut.-General von Zwehl in "Militär Wochenblatt" No. 36, of September 1919. For the German formations in action at Mons see later in this Chapter.

of illuminating flares, which the British soldier then saw for the first time.

Sketch 3. Maps 3 & 5. There was no real anxiety at G.H.Q., therefore, except as regards events further east. During the day the Flying Corps had reported fighting about Charleroi, two powerful German columns moving south-westward from Charleroi and from Luttre, and a heavy engagement at Thuin, the left of the French Fifth Army. Another report, which came to hand soon after 5 P.M., stated that Tournai appeared to be in the enemy's hands, and that a long column of all arms was moving southward through Ladeuze (13 miles west of Soignies), Grosage and Neufmaison towards Ville Pommeroeul.[1] The conclusion to which this intelligence tended was, that the enemy would probably continue to develop his attack during the night and upon the following day. At 8.40 P.M. this conclusion was embodied in a message from Sir John French to the II. Corps: "I will stand the attack on the ground now "occupied by the troops. You will therefore strengthen "your position by every possible means during the night."

Further information, however, which arrived from French Headquarters during the evening and just before midnight, led the British Commander-in-Chief to decide that his position in advance of the general line was strategically untenable, and that an immediate retirement was necessary. He thereby escaped, to use the enemy's words, a "veritable wasps' nest"[2] and his action fell in with the wishes of General Joffre, official notification of which reached him next day shortly after 1 P.M. in two messages.

The first message was to the effect that the French commander had decided that his Fifth Army should manœuvre in retreat and rest its left on the fortress of Maubeuge, and its right on the wooded *massif* of the Ardennes, remaining in liaison with the British Expeditionary Force by means of cavalry. The second pointed out the desirability of delaying the advance of the enemy between Maubeuge—Valenciennes, and gave Cambrai as the general direction of retirement for the British if the enemy should appear in superior force, with their right on Le Cateau, and their left on the water line Denain—Bouchain—Arleux. G.H.Q. informed General Joffre that the British Force was falling back slowly to the position Maubeuge—Valenciennes, and that, if driven from this, it would act in accordance with his wishes.

[1] The German *IV. Corps.*

[2] Lieut.-General von Zwehl.

The reason for these messages was sufficiently cogent. As a result of his operations on the 23rd, General de Langle de Cary had ordered a general retirement of the French Fourth Army on the 24th to the line Montmédy—Sedan—Mézières, that is, the line of the Chiers and Meuse. In consequence of the failure of the Fourth Army to get forward, General Lanrezac's right flank on the Meuse was not only exposed to the attack of, but was actually attacked by, the German *Third Army* from the east, whilst the German *Second Army* advanced against his main force near Charleroi from the north; on the night of the 23rd/24th he therefore ordered the French Fifth Army to commence retiring before daybreak south of the general line Givet—Phillippeville—Beaumont—Maubeuge, with its left, the XVIII. Corps, about Solre le Château, 22 miles south-east of Mons. General Valabrègue, hearing of the attack on the XVIII. Corps near Thuin on the 23rd, had assembled his Reserve divisions that night near Cousolre, 10 miles due east of Maubeuge. There was therefore not only a considerable gap between the Allied forces, but the French were preparing a retirement that might increase it. 23 Aug. 1914.

## The German Account of Mons

The monograph "Die Schlacht bei Mons," published by the German General Staff at the end of 1919, gives a very clear account of the fight, with excellent maps showing the attacks of the different corps. According to this, $3\frac{1}{2}$ divisions (the *17th*, *18th*, *6th* and part of *5th*) of the *First Army* attacked the British 3rd Division, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ (part of *5th*, the *7th* and *8th*) the British 5th Division. Sketch 3. Map 5.

The *IX. Corps* (*17th* and *18th Divisions*) attacked south-west towards Mons on the front Villers Ghislain—Nimy. On its right came the *III. Corps* (*6th* and *5th Divisions*) against Jemappes and Les Herbières and, further west, as far as Lock No. 5, the *IV. Corps* (*7th* and *8th Divisions*). At nightfall the *VII. Corps* of the *Second Army*, on the left of the *IX.*, had got no further than Binche, and the *II. Corps*, on the right of the *IV.*, was some 15 miles north of Condé, still marching southwards heading for that town, with the *II. Cavalry Corps* on its right facing westwards towards Tourcoing—Roubaix—Lille.

It was part of the *17th Division Artillery* (six batteries) behind Villers Ghislain, and possibly some of the *VII. Corps Artillery*, covered by the *16th Dragoons* and a Fusilier

battalion, which fired on the I. Corps as related in the narrative.

The German account is frank enough ; it states : "Well "entrenched and completely hidden, the enemy opened a "murderous fire . . . the casualties increased . . . the "rushes became shorter, and finally the whole advance "stopped . . . . with bloody losses, the attack gradually "came to an end." As soon as it got dark the Germans gladly stopped.

In the *17th Division* the *75th* (*Bremen*) *Regiment* lost 5 officers and 376 men in one attack.[1] This division made no attempt to advance after dusk fell.

In the *18th Division* at the beginning of darkness the brigades dug in on the line they had reached, and bivouacked.

The *6th Division* got across the Canal, but towards 7 P.M. all attempts to advance failed, and the division went into bivouac. "Fighting posts, pushed a few hundred yards out, protected the tired troops."

The *5th Division* failed to get across the Canal. One of its regiments, the *12th Brandenburg Grenadiers*, whose attack on the West Kents has been referred to, had lost "25 officers and far more than 500 N.C.O.'s and men," when "the summer night settled on the blood-stained battle-"field and with its shade gave a protecting curtain against "the hostile fire." It was this division whose singing was heard : to cheer themselves, the men sang "Deutschland über alles."

The *IV. Corps* did not cross the Canal during the battle. Some patrols managed to get over after midnight, but "up to 9 P.M. the enemy fire was as strong as ever."

Von Kluck, according to the General Staff account, "after the stubborn defence of the enemy, especially "opposite the *III. Corps*, expected that the British would "offer energetic resistance again next day on the high ground "south of Mons. He therefore resolved to continue the "attack next day enveloping the left flank, with the inten-"tion of cutting off the enemy's retreat to the *west*."[2] The *II. Cavalry Corps* was ordered south to assist. Von Kluck, in his version of his orders, adds "The attack will be so directed as to force the enemy into Maubeuge."

[1] See p. 80.

[2] Kuhl, "Marne," p. 70, confirms this.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RETREAT FROM MONS AND THE ACTION OF ÉLOUGES

### The Situation of the British at Dawn on the 24th August 1914

(See Sketch 3; Maps 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, & 8)

The night of the 23rd/24th August passed without serious disturbance of any kind from the enemy; and at dawn on the 24th the Army occupied a line facing roughly north-east, seventeen miles long, with the centre some three miles south of Mons. The exact positions from right to left were :— Sketch 3. Maps 6 & 7.

| | |
|---|---|
| **I. Corps :** | |
| 1st Division . . . | . Grand Reng, Rouveroy, Givry. |
| 5th Cavalry Brigade . | . Givry. |
| 2nd Division : | |
| 6th Infantry Brigade | . Harmignies. |
| 4th do. | . Harveng. |
| 5th do. | . Paturages. |
| 2/Connaught Rangers | . Bougnies. |
| **II. Corps :** | |
| 3rd Division : | |
| 8th Infantry Brigade | . Nouvelles. |
| 7th do. | . Ciply. |
| 9th do. | . Frameries. |
| 5th Division : | |
| 1/Bedford (15th I.B.) | . Paturages. |
| 13th Infantry Brigade<br>1/Dorset (15th I.B.) | } Wasmes. |
| 14th Infantry Brigade | . Hornu—Bois de Boussu. |
| 15th do.<br>(less two battalions) | . Champ des Sarts—Hornu. |
| 19th Infantry Brigade .<br>Cavalry Division . . | { Thulin, Élouges, Audregnies,<br>Quiévrain. |

It must be remembered that the bulk of the Army had been subjected to great fatigue. The 1st Division, though scarcely engaged, had been hurried into its place by a forced march during the night of the 22nd/23rd and had been under arms for eighteen hours before it could billet or bivouac. Of the II. Corps, the 8th Infantry Brigade had been fighting all day, and the greater part of it got no rest until the early morning of the 24th. The 9th Infantry Brigade could not get into billets at Frameries until late. The 13th Infantry Brigade did not reach its assigned position much before daylight on the 24th, and the 14th Infantry Brigade was little earlier. The 15th Infantry Brigade fared better, though it did not settle down until midnight. The 19th Infantry Brigade had only just left the train at Valenciennes, when it was hurried up to take over a section of the outpost line. Altogether, the circumstances were very trying for the reservists, who formed 60 per cent. of the infantry, and were for the most part still out of condition.

Map 3. Shortly after 11 P.M. on the 23rd the senior General Staff officers of the I. and II. Corps and the Cavalry Division, in view of a possible retirement, had been summoned to General Headquarters at Le Cateau. There about 1 A.M. the Chief of the General Staff explained that it was the intention of Sir John French to make a general retreat southwards of about eight miles to an east and west line, previously reconnoitred, from La Longueville (five miles west of Maubeuge) westward through Bavai and four miles beyond it to the hamlet of La Boiserette,[1] a front of about seven miles. He instructed the General Staff officers that the corps were to retire in mutual co-operation, the actual order of retirement to be settled by the two corps commanders in consultation. Brigadier-General Forestier-Walker left immediately for II. Corps Headquarters, thirty-five miles off, by motor car; but the I. Corps was in telegraphic communication with G.H.Q., and Brigadier-General J. E. Gough could therefore send off a message at once, which reached General Haig about 2 A.M. He was able to give the additional information that the I. Corps was to cover the retirement of the II., the cavalry simultaneously making a demonstration, and that the roads through Maubeuge were not open to the British. G.H.Q. further suggested that the left of the I. Corps should receive particular attention, and that the line from

[1] Misspelt La Bois Crette on some maps.

Bonnet (six miles north of Maubeuge) westwards to Blaregnies should be firmly established before the British left was withdrawn. Actually, it was mid-day before the corps commanders found opportunity to meet and arrange how these suggestions should be put into practice. 24 Aug. 1914.

## The Retreat of the I. Corps

In the meantime, however, to carry out the orders the I. Corps detailed a special rear guard, composed of the 5th Cavalry Brigade, J Battery, the XXXVI. and XLI. Brigades R.F.A., and the 4th (Guards) Brigade, under the command of Brigadier-General Horne, R.A., of the corps staff. It was to concentrate at Bonnet and make an offensive demonstration at daybreak, so as to delay the enemy's leading troops whilst the 1st and 2nd Divisions fell back. Map 6

To save time, General Haig motored to 1st and 2nd Divisional Headquarters and in person issued orders for them to retire by two roads on Feignies and Bavai. The main body of the 1st Division marched off at 4 A.M., unmolested, except by a little ineffective shelling, and by a few small bodies of cavalry, which were roughly handled by the infantry and the artillery. The 2nd Division followed at 4.45 A.M. and was equally undisturbed. Even the rear guard was not really troubled:[1] the 4th (Guards) Brigade retired by successive echelons from Harveng and Bougnies to a position two miles back between Quévy le Petit and Genly, pursued by heavy but ineffectual bursts of shrapnel. The 5th Cavalry Brigade covered the ground on the left of the Guards from Vellereille le Sec westward, through Harmignies and Nouvelles, to Ciply, under similar ineffective shelling; there was no real pressure from the enemy. Here, for the present, we will leave the rear guard.

The main bodies of the divisions reached their destinations at Feignies, La Longueville and Bavai between 9 and 10 P.M., with no further mishap than the loss of tools and other articles which had been unloaded by the regimental transport and could not be re-loaded in time. None the less, the men were extremely fatigued; they had had little rest for over sixty hours; the country was close and cramped, and the day had been exceedingly hot; there had

[1] As will be seen in the account of the German operations on the 24th, no orders were issued for pursuit in this part of the field till 8 A.M.

been constant deployments and labour at entrenching—inseparable from a retreat; so that the men suffered greatly from weariness and want of sleep. Yet one battalion commander records on this date:—"We had marched "59 miles in the last 64 hours, beginning the march in "the middle of an entirely sleepless night and getting only "8 hours altogether during the other two nights. Many "men could hardly put one leg before another, yet they all "marched in singing. The other battalions of the brigade "did not arrive till long after dark, but they also marched "in singing."

## The Retreat of the II. Corps

Maps 3, 6, & 7. The comparative ease with which the I. Corps was able to withdraw was far from reassuring, for it might indicate that the Germans intended to make a decisive turning effort further west, as, indeed, was their plan; and soon after 6 A.M. an aeroplane which had been sent out at dawn brought information that was not calculated to diminish the anxiety of the Commander-in-Chief:—A column, from five to ten miles long, had been seen at 4.30 A.M. moving south from Leuze towards Peruwelz, having changed direction, at Leuze, off the road that runs westward from Ath to Tournai. This could hardly mean anything less than a German division;[1] and the line of march from Peruwelz to Condé would carry it to the west of the extreme western flank of the British Army. Nothing, however, was known of this at 4 A.M. at the commencement of the British retreat; and the first movements of the II. Corps were naturally made in complete ignorance of it. General Smith-Dorrien, in pursuance of the Commander-in-Chief's original orders, had made his dispositions before dawn to withstand another German attack on the ground on which his corps had spent the night. These dispositions proved of advantage for gaining time when the instructions to retire arrived; for, before the II. Corps could retreat, it was imperative that the roads should be cleared of all transport and impedimenta, and the orders to that effect did not filter down to the brigades of the 3rd Division before 4.30 A.M. Meanwhile, before dawn, the Germans had already opened a heavy bombardment against the right of the II. Corps; and within an hour the fire extended westwards along the whole length of the line, and by

[1] It was the *II. Corps* (see "Mons," Sketch 2).

5.15 A.M. a general infantry attack was rapidly developing. At 5.30 A.M. the commander of the 3rd Division became aware that the main body of the I. Corps was retiring, and sent a staff officer to reconnoitre a second position further to the south. Half an hour later he despatched orders to the 8th Infantry Brigade, the right of his line, to withdraw from Nouvelles.[1] 24 Aug. 1914.

Beyond the shelling, which did no damage, the 8th Infantry Brigade had been little troubled; the German infantry did not show itself at all; and at 8 A.M. the brigade began its march southward upon Genly. The 7th Infantry Brigade about Ciply, and the 9th Infantry Brigade at Frameries, when they began to move in their turn, did not escape quite so easily. The Germans were evidently bent upon holding them to their ground for a time, and about 6 A.M. launched their infantry in dense waves to the attack. They were thrown back with heavy loss by the South Lancashire and the Lincolnshire Regiments, who formed the rear guards of these two brigades; the 109th Battery also found excellent targets in the masses of the enemy visible behind the

[1] The following message from the II. Corps to the 5th Division gives a good idea of the situation about 7 A.M.:

To 5th Division. From II. Corps.
G. 313. 24th [August 1914].

First Corps are retiring from their line Peissant—Haulchin—Harmignies to positions at Villers Sire Nicole and Quevy le Petit aaa Sixth Infantry Brigade moving to position about cross roads one mile west of Harveng aaa All these positions are to cover retirement of Third Division when that becomes necessary aaa Fifth Cavalry Brigade to Harveng with detachment and battery at Harmignies aaa Third Division right flank will probably fall back to Harveng early aaa When Third Division is forced to retire or ordered to retire it will take up position about Sars la Bruyere aaa Your retirement will have to be more or less simultaneous and you should at once send to reconnoitre a position if possible about Blaugies and Montignies sur Roc or where you can find it aaa Your roads of retirement will be those described to Colonel Romer [General Staff of 5th Division] and in addition that through Blaugies and Erquennes to Hergies but not through second *I* of Pissotiau [that is west of the Blaugies—Erquennes—Hergies road] which belongs to Third Division aaa If you feel yourself sufficiently strong where you are you might send a brigade or less back to your next position to prepare it aaa We cannot tell when Third Division will have to retire to Sars la Bruyere but hope that it will at least not be for two or three hours.

G. F. W. [Forestier-Walker], B.G.

7.15 A.M.

Copy handed to Col. Maurice [G.S. 3rd Division].

One by tel.
One by officer.

front line. About 9 A.M. the 9th Infantry Brigade fell back, in perfect order, through the town of Frameries, where there was some sharp fighting before the troops got clear of the streets, and marched southward upon Sars la Bruyère. The 7th Infantry Brigade held on for a little longer, and the South Lancashire were enfiladed by machine guns from the slag-heaps about Frameries, and lost between two and three hundred men before this brigade also was withdrawn towards Genly. The Germans made no attempt to press them; indeed, they handled the 3rd Division on this day with singular respect. It had, in fact, though it was not appreciated at the time, inflicted on them very heavy losses.

### The German Account of Frameries

The German accounts of the fighting at Frameries are so greatly to the credit of the British Expeditionary Force, that they are worth recording here.

The attack on the Lincolnshire and South Lancashire was made by a whole German division—the *6th* of the *III. Corps*. There is a detailed account of the action by Hauptmann von Brandis of the *24th* (*Brandenburg*) *Regiment*.[1] He says:—

"Our artillery is to prepare the assault. . . . A continuous stream of gun and howitzer shell thunders out, "hurtling and howling over our heads, and bursting in dust "and smoke on the edge of the village [Frameries]. No "human beings could possibly live there. At 7 A.M. six "companies of the regiment advance to the attack. We "remain impatiently in reserve. . . . If we thought that "the English had been shelled enough to be storm-ripe, we "were fairly mistaken. They met us with well-aimed fire."

His company was then sent up to reinforce. As it reached the firing line, the men shout "Vorwärts" expecting to carry it with them, but no one rose. "There were "only dead and wounded to be seen. Tommy seems to have "waited for the moment of the assault. He had carefully "studied our training manuals, and suddenly, when we were "well in the open, he turned his machine guns on." It was only however rapid rifle fire. The assault failing, the village was shelled again, and the attack renewed with larger forces. Eventually the Germans entered Frameries and found no defenders there.

[1] In his book "Die Stürmer von Douaumont."

"Up to all the tricks of the trade from their experience 24 Aug. 1914.
"of small wars, the English veterans brilliantly understood
"how to slip off at the last moment." Of the casualties he says: "Our battalion alone lost three company com-
"manders, and, besides, every second officer and every
"third man."

Captain Liebenow of the *64th Infantry Regiment*, of the same brigade as von Brandis, states[1] that his battalion at Frameries lost "the adjutant, every fourth man and, "of three companies, every lieutenant."

Captain Heubner, of the *20th Infantry Regiment*,[2] states: "many of our companies had heavy losses in the "attack on Frameries. . . . As on the previous day, the "English again vanished without leaving a trace (*spurlos*)."

## The Fighting on the Left Flank of the II. Corps

It was in the section immediately to the west of Frameries Maps 6 & 7.
that trouble was first experienced. The right of the 5th Division at Paturages, in the midst of the sea of mining villages, was held by three battalions of the 5th Infantry Brigade, and one, the Bedfords, of the 15th. The German guns opened their bombardment before dawn, and continued it steadily for some four hours, though to little purpose. The enemy infantry meanwhile fell upon a company of the Bedfords near Paturages, and a very lively fight followed without definite result. Meanwhile, further to the west, the Dorsets (15th Infantry Brigade, but detached with the 13th) were well entrenched along the railway to the north-west of Wasmes, with two guns of the 121st Battery dug in near their extreme left. Still further to the left, in the 13th Infantry Brigade, the 2/Yorkshire Light Infantry was coming into position with the 37th Howitzer Battery level with it. The 2/Duke of Wellington's, which was shortly to relieve the 1/Dorset, and the 1/Royal West Kent were in Wasmes; the 2/Scottish Borderers was on the left at Champ des Sarts. The 1/Norfolk and 1/Cheshire of the 15th Infantry Brigade, together with the 119th Battery, were ordered to Dour (two miles south-west) as divisional reserve. The XXVII. Brigade R.F.A.[3]

[1] In a letter to "The Times Literary Supplement," 4th September 1918.
[2] In his book "Unter Emmich vor Lüttich, Unter Kluck vor Paris."
[3] Less the 119th Battery.

was about Champ des Sarts; the VIII. Howitzer Brigade (less the 37th Battery) to the right and in advance of it; and the XXVIII. Brigade R.F.A. was to the left of it, to the north of Dour.

In this section of the line the enemy began operations at dawn by bombarding the northern edge of St. Ghislain for two hours, after which he pushed his patrols forward and ascertained that the place had been evacuated by the British.[1] The infantry[2] then crossed the Canal by some of the foot-bridges still left standing; and a battalion and a half, hastening through the deserted streets, deployed from the southern edge of Hornu, the next village, opposite Champ des Sarts. The two advanced guns of the 121st Battery, which had opened fire, were quickly compelled to retire by the enemy's machine guns; but the Dorsets and the 37th Battery brought the German advance to an abrupt standstill with considerable loss.

At 9 A.M. the three battalions of the 5th Infantry Brigade on the right of the 5th Division at Paturages, in accordance with their orders from the I. Corps, began to withdraw by Culot and Eugies southward upon Sars la Bruyère. Roused at 4 A.M. the Worcestershire and the H.L.I. had dug in on the front line, whilst the Oxfords entrenched a position in rear to cover retirement. Though under shell fire not one of them had fired a shot nor seen a German, but their retirement at once brought trouble upon the denuded right flank of the II. Corps, where stood the Bedfords. A detachment of the Dorsets filled the vacant place for the moment, and the resistance was for the time maintained; the Germans were evidently less concerned to drive the British back than to hold them to their ground.

None the less, they were not content to be checked at the exits of Hornu. Again and again they tried to debouch, but without success, the 37th Battery working great havoc among them. It seems that the Germans must have lost heavily, for the *Brandenburg Grenadiers*, though exhausted and thinned by the engagement of the previous day, were hastily called up to reinforce the firing line.[3]

[1] Writing of the advance through St. Ghislain on the 24th, Hauptmann Bloem (p. 153) writes: "Truly, our artillery shot famously this night and this morning"; and he says that the town looked "as if it had been visited by a whirlwind."

[2] *5th Division.*

[3] Of the approach to Hornu, Hauptmann Bloem says (p. 156) that his battalion was fired on by gun and rifles whilst it was in column of march, and the regimental adjutant brought him the order: "The *52nd* in front are heavily engaged and require reinforcement at any cost. Haste is

Meanwhile, the German artillery had for some time been shelling Wasmes furiously, causing some loss in the 13th Infantry Brigade both to the Duke's and to the West Kents; but the former, as has been told, had been withdrawn to relieve the Dorsets, and shortly afterwards two companies of the West Kents were also shifted eastwards to fill a gap between the Duke's and the Yorkshire Light Infantry. The German guns then turned with fury upon the British batteries, and the XXVII. Brigade R.F.A. at Champ des Sarts was compelled to withdraw under heavy fire. But here, once again, the enemy did not seriously press the attack of his infantry; he had already lost too heavily. 24 Aug. 1914.

On the front of the 14th Infantry Brigade, on the left of the 13th, all was quiet. Still further to the west, the 19th Infantry Brigade had received orders from G.H.Q. at midnight to fall back to Élouges, six miles south-east, and at 2 A.M. it began its march upon that village by Hensies and Quiévrain. At the same hour, the French 84th Territorial Division evacuated Condé and commenced its retirement towards Cambrai. At dawn the Cavalry Division, which was in rear of the left, began to move; General Allenby, finding that the Germans were in great strength on his left, decided to withdraw some distance, and sent a message to Sir Charles Fergusson to that effect; but, on hearing from him that the 5th Division was to hold its ground, agreed to cover its left flank. A squadron of the 9th Lancers, feeling its way forward to Thulin, the left of the II. Corps, found the enemy at the northern edge of the town and engaged him. Meanwhile, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade had taken up a position south of the main highway to Valenciennes and astride the road from Thulin to Élouges; the 1st Cavalry Brigade was on the railway to its left; the 3rd to the left rear of the 1st near a sugar factory about a thousand yards south-east of Quiévrain, and the 4th at Sebourg, about five miles further south. There they remained until the 19th Infantry Brigade had been withdrawn, when it passed under Map 8.

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imperative." Bloem cannot believe his observer when he reports "Herr Hauptmann, the enemy is retiring." "What—what do you say—the enemy is retiring. You mean he is advancing." . . . "In the thick masses everybody rushes forward, Grenadiers and Fusiliers, men of all companies mixed up . . . we jump into the English trenches. . . . Suddenly something awful happens." They are immediately heavily shelled by their own artillery.

No casualties for Bloem's regiment for this action can be found in the official lists for 1914.

General Allenby's command, and was halted at Baisieux, two miles south-west of Élouges, to the vicinity of which the 1st Cavalry Brigade also retired. Meanwhile, the advanced squadron of the 9th Lancers was disputing the advance of the Germans from Thulin, and inflicting some loss upon them, though all the time falling back upon its main body. About 6 A.M. German guns opened fire upon that main body from the neighbourhood of Thulin, and about 7 A.M. German infantry and artillery—of the *7th Division* of the *IV. Corps*—were seen moving westward along the highway to Valenciennes. One party turning southward, came down the road towards Élouges in column of route, and, after suffering severely from the rifles of the 18th Hussars and 9th Lancers upon either side of it, deployed and advanced upon a wide front.

Thereupon, General Allenby, ordering the road Élouges —Audregnies—Angre—Roisin (five miles south of Élouges) to be left open for the retreat of the 5th Division, began about 9 A.M. to withdraw his troops slowly southward. Though he had sent three officers, one of them in a motor car, to ascertain whether the 5th Division had begun its retirement, not one of these messengers had yet returned. Accordingly, he made his dispositions for retreat with due precautions for the safety of the left flank of the Army. The 19th Infantry Brigade was directed to fall back and take up a position at Rombies (three miles south-west of Baisieux and about seven south of Condé), and then the Cavalry Division began to withdraw, by successive brigades, in the same direction. In order to delay the enemy's advance to the utmost, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, which formed the rear guard, utilized the sunken roads, mineral railways and slag-heaps that broke up the ground between the Mons—Valenciennes road on the north and the villages of Élouges and Audregnies on the south. It was supported by L Battery R.H.A., which was in position in the middle of the area behind the railway between Élouges and Quiévrain. It was very heavily shelled as it retired, but fortunately little harm was done, and there was no real pressure from the enemy. By 11.30 A.M. the very last parties had come in, and the 2nd Cavalry Brigade was moving through Audregnies upon Angre, the 18th Hussars bringing up the rear.

### I. Corps Rear Guard and 3rd Division
### 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

So much for the first moves of the great retreat. The succeeding hours of the 24th August likewise passed without serious trouble on the right of the Army. General Horne's rear guard had, as related,[1] taken up a position on a front of three miles facing north-east, with its right on the road from Mons to Maubeuge, about a mile north of Bonnet, with its left near Genly. About 10.30 a.m. the 8th Infantry Brigade came in on its western flank. The 7th Infantry Brigade, assembling at Genly from Ciply and Nouvelles, passed through the 8th on its way to Blaregnies, where it—or, at any rate, some part of it—halted and faced about. About 11 a.m. the 5th Infantry Brigade[2] likewise joined the 8th on the western side, forming up in depth from Eugies to Sars la Bruyère. The 9th Infantry Brigade made its way, as indeed, from the direction of the roads, was inevitable, to the same point; and there the 3rd Division, together with General Horne's rear guard, waited until far into the afternoon. There was no pressure whatever upon them. Indeed, at 11 a.m. General Horne reported that the special responsibility of his rear guard was at an end, and that he proposed to return his troops to their divisions. But, soon after 1 p.m., a message came in to the I. Corps Headquarters from the II. Corps that the retreat of the 5th Division on the left was delayed, and that meanwhile the 3rd Division would stand fast. Sir Douglas Haig directed his rear guard to conform with the movements of the 3rd Division; it therefore remained in its position, little troubled or threatened, but stationary. We will now turn westward again and see what had delayed the retirement of the 5th Division.

24 Aug. 1914. Maps 6 & 7.

### 5th Division
### 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

We left the Dorsets and Bedfords at Paturages covering the right of the 13th Infantry Brigade, which was engaging the enemy issuing from the southern exits of Hornu. After the withdrawal of the 5th Infantry Brigade

Maps 6 & 7.

[1] See p. 89.

[2] That is to say, the three battalions which had been at Paturages. The remaining battalion (2/Connaught Rangers) was with the 4th (Guards) Brigade.

on their right, it was evident that these two battalions could not maintain themselves in such a position for long, and at 10.30 A.M. Brigadier-General Count Gleichen began the somewhat awkward operation of withdrawing them westward through Paturages. It was none too soon. The first line transport of the Dorsets, retiring by La Bouverie on its way to Blaugies, six miles north of Bavai, was caught in an ambush by the Germans,[1] but managed to extricate itself with little loss; and at 11 A.M. the Bedfords on the right (south of the railway line from Wasmes to Frameries), and the Dorsets on the left began their movement south-west across the rear of the 13th Infantry Brigade, towards Petit Wasmes and Warquignies. They had some sharp fighting, in which British marksmanship seems to have told its usual tale, before they could clear themselves from the streets; part of the Bedfords, acting as escort to the divisional artillery, struck due south from Warquignies, and made their way to St. Waast les Bavay.[2] The remainder marched to Athis, west of Blaugies, and the bulk of the Dorsets to Blaugies itself, where both halted, the time being about 2 P.M.

Meanwhile, about 11 A.M., Sir Charles Fergusson received a message from the II. Corps, giving him discretion to fall back as soon as the troops on his right had retired; finding that they had already gone and that the enemy was working round his right flank, he proceeded to follow their example. The 13th Infantry Brigade was holding its own with no great difficulty, though the enemy was shelling the 2/Duke of Wellington's on the right and inflicting considerable loss; he was however doing little mischief to the 2/Yorkshire Light Infantry, and still refrained from any serious infantry attack. The 14th Infantry Brigade, on the left of the 13th, was left in comparative quiet; the 2/Manchester, part of which had been moved up to the left of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, alone being under heavy artillery fire. This brigade began the withdrawal by successive battalions, with little interference from the enemy, and formed up at Blaugies to cover the retreat of the 13th Infantry Brigade. The latter was allowed to fall back without serious trouble. The VIII. Howitzer Brigade withdrew at once; the XXVIII. Brigade R.F.A. left a section of each battery behind to

[1] Part of the *20th Regiment* of the *6th Division*, it appears, had pressed on (see "Mons"), between Frameries and Paturages.

[2] On some maps St. Waast la Vallée, two miles west of Bavai.

support the infantry rear guards; and the operations seem to have proceeded with little or no interference from the German infantry. One German battery did, indeed, come into action in the open at three thousand yards' range, but was quickly silenced. Only in one quarter does the German infantry appear to have advanced in earnest. By some mishap, the order to retreat did not reach the 2/Duke's, which accordingly remained in position, with a battery of the XXVII. Brigade R.F.A. close to it. About 11.30 A.M., exactly the time when the order should have affected the Duke's, the Germans suddenly concentrated a tremendous fire upon this battery from guns which they had brought up to close range. A sharp fight followed during the next hour and a half, and it was only the rifles of the infantry that saved the British battery. About 1 P.M. the Germans debouched in thick skirmishing formation followed by dense masses from the Boussu—Quiévrain road on the left front of the British battalion, but were greeted by such a rain of bullets from rifles and machine guns at 800 yards, and such a salute from the battery that they stopped dead. Under cover of this final stroke, the guns limbered up and the battalion withdrew south-west into Dour. The Duke's had suffered heavily, their casualties reaching nearly four hundred of all ranks, but they had driven back six battalions.[1] By 2 P.M. the 13th and 14th Infantry Brigades were assembled at Warquignies and Blaugies, respectively, ready to continue their retreat to their places in the new position: St. Waast (2 miles west of Bavai) and Eth (4 miles west and a little north of St. Waast). 24 Aug. 1914.

### The Flank Guard Action at Élouges

But the 5th Division was not destined to march so far to the south-west as Eth. Hardly had the 13th and 14th Infantry Brigades begun their retreat, when Sir Charles Fergusson became aware that the withdrawal of the cavalry and 19th Infantry Brigade had been premature, and that his left flank was seriously threatened by German forces of considerable strength advancing due south between Thulin and Condé.[2] At 11.45 A.M. he sent an urgent message to the Cavalry Division to come to his Map 8.

[1] *66th* and *26th Regiments* of the *7th Division* (see "Mons," Sketch 5). It should be recalled that a German infantry regiment contained three battalions.

[2] The whole *IV. Corps.*

assistance, and at the same time placed the 1/Norfolks and 1/Cheshire, together with the 119th Battery, all of which were still in reserve near Divisional Headquarters at Dour, under the command of Colonel Ballard of the Norfolk Regiment. The first orders given to this officer were to advance north and counter-attack. Accordingly, he moved his troops northward for half a mile till a staff officer came up and directed them to be moved westward into position along the Élouges—Audregnies—Angre road, down which, as we have seen, the rear guard of the Cavalry Division had already retired. Thither, accordingly, they marched. Meanwhile, General Allenby had received General Fergusson's message about noon, and responded instantly by sending back the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Brigades to the vicinity of Audregnies, which brought them within a couple of miles of Colonel Ballard. The 18th Hussars, who had just quitted their position of the forenoon, returned; L Battery came up next at a rapid trot, and halted just to the west of Élouges; whilst the 9th Lancers formed up by the road immediately to north of that village, with the 4th Dragoon Guards in rear. Simultaneously, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, which was nearing Rombies, faced about and, hastening back, occupied a position on the ridge immediately west of Audregnies.

The scene of the action which was about to take place is an irregular parallelogram, bounded on the north by the great highway from Mons to Valenciennes, on the east by the Élouges rivulet, on the south by the road from Élouges to Audregnies, and on the west by the valley of the Honnelle: a space, roughly speaking, about three thousand yards from north to south, by five thousand from east to west. From south to north the ground forms a perfect natural glacis, at this time covered with corn-stooks. Across the parallelogram runs the railway from Élouges to Quiévrain, for the most part sunk in cutting and bordered upon each side by a quickset hedge. About a thousand yards to the south, a mineral railway runs parallel with it for about half its length, and then comes to an abrupt end in a group of cottages. More or less parallel to the Honnelle, the old Roman Road, famous under the name of the Chaussée Brunehaut, runs straight as an arrow north-west from Audregnies, cutting the great highway about a thousand yards east of Quiévrain. Upon this road, about a mile and a quarter north of Audregnies,

stood a sugar-factory, and, immediately to the east of it, a cluster of high slag-heaps. 24 Aug. 1914.

It was now about 12.30 P.M. Colonel Ballard's force was just taking up its ground, facing nearly west, the Norfolks on the right, with their right resting on the railway from Élouges to Quiévrain, and the Cheshire on the left, carrying the line to the northern outskirts of Audregnies, and securing touch with the cavalry. All had, so far, been comparatively quiet, when a sudden burst of fire, both of guns and rifles, from the north-west, gave warning that the Germans were opening their attack. It developed in two distinct columns, one from Quiévrain, the other from the Bois de Déduit and Baisieux south-east upon Audregnies. General de Lisle (2nd Cavalry Brigade), galloping to the 9th Lancers, instructed the commanding officer to deliver, if necessary, a mounted attack northwards in order to take the German advance in flank; whilst L Battery, finding no suitable forward position near, wheeled about and galloped south, coming into action behind the railway just to the east of Audregnies.

Colonel Campbell ordered the 9th Lancers to advance, which they did in column of squadrons at the gallop, with two troops of the 4th Dragoon Guards echeloned to their left rear. Crossing the sunken road from Baisieux to Élouges at a point where it ran level with the ground, they galloped on, speared a couple of German scouts near the road, and caught sight of a few more taking cover among the corn-stooks; then, their advance checked by the fire of nine batteries, they hesitated. Some dismounted by the sugar-factory, others swept round to the right and back towards Audregnies, and a great number, retiring along the mineral railway towards Élouges, rallied there upon the 18th Hussars. Simultaneously, a squadron of the 4th Dragoon Guards galloped down a narrow lane towards Baisieux, in order to seize a house at the end of it, and thus to cover a further advance upon Quiévrain. As it went it was shattered by heavy fire of rifles and shrapnel and, though the cottage was eventually reached and held, the effort led to no result.

The advance of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade seems to have produced some moral effect in delaying the progress of the German attack, and so gained time for Colonel Ballard's flank guard to settle down, not, indeed, in entrenchments—for there was not a moment to spare for digging—but in fair natural cover. Probably it made matters easier also

for the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, which was now in position further south about Angre, with its machine guns firing down the valley on Baisieux, supported by the 1st Cavalry Brigade and covered by the guns of D and E Batteries in rear. About 12.45 P.M. the action became serious, with obvious signs of an enveloping movement. The Germans had at least seven batteries in action about a mile north of the Valenciennes road towards the hamlet of La Croix, and, under the protection of their shells, the main body of their infantry—apparently a division of the *IV. Corps*[1]—closed up on to the advanced guards and strove to carry the advance further. Solid masses emerged from Quiévrain and from a small wood at its north-eastern corner; and dense columns came streaming down the three broad rides that led from the Bois de Déduit, midway between Quiévrain and Baisieux, into the open. L Battery now had the chance for which every gunner prays; no sooner did the Germans show themselves than it opened upon them with shrapnel, bursting its shells low, with an accuracy which literally mowed down the advancing masses. In vain they ran back to cover, rallied and endeavoured to press forward. In vain four German batteries, three firing shrapnel and one high explosive, strove to silence the exasperating guns which were arresting the progress of the infantry. Their shrapnel burst high and scattered harmless bullets, while their high-explosive, with the exception of one shell which caused ten casualties, fell wide and did no damage. L Battery was not to be silenced, and forbade, under heavy penalty, any hostile advance from Quiévrain.

Colonel Ballard's infantry, likewise, seemed secure with a perfect natural glacis before it; and the 119th Battery, which was in position south of Élouges, not less so. The fire of the German artillery was heavy, but its shell, for the most part, went over. The 119th Battery answered the German guns with considerable effect; and the Norfolks found excellent targets in the German infantry, who strove to swarm out of Quiévrain, while the Cheshire brought both rifles and machine guns to bear with great execution upon the masses that were endeavouring to debouch from the Bois de Déduit. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade, which was spared all artillery fire, likewise held its own successfully south of the infantry, before Baisieux, and, with the help of D and E Batteries, effectually barred

[1] All four regiments, twelve battalions, of the *8th Division* were engaged ("Mons").

the way against the Germans at that point. The baffled enemy then tried a movement still further to the south by Marchipont, but was stopped by the 5th Dragoon Guards, who had come up, from the 1st Cavalry Brigade, on the left of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. Everywhere the Germans were checked. The first effort of von Kluck's enveloping movement was, in fact, completely and victoriously foiled. 24 Aug. 1914.

There were, however, disquieting signs of a still wider turning movement further to the west about Quarouble (three miles south-west of Quiévrain), where a mass of German infantry, thought to be the flank guard of an army corps[1] could be seen moving steadily to the south. Accordingly, shortly after (about 2.30 P.M.) Colonel Ballard gave the order to retire.

### Resumption of the Retreat

About the same hour the troops to the eastward were also set in motion to resume the retreat. The 3rd Division marched from Genly—Sars la Bruyère for Bavai en route for the villages to the south-west of that town; General Horne's rear guard, on its right, moved last of all, not until about 4.30 P.M. The main body of the 5th Division struck south from Blaugies through Athis upon Bavai and St. Waast, its place in the selected position; and the Cavalry Division also prepared to withdraw, the 1st Cavalry Brigade moving up to Onnézies to cover the first rearward bound of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade to Angre. Meanwhile, the effect of the advance of the Germans[2] to the east of Colonel Ballard's flank guard was beginning to be felt, and the 119th Battery, between the fire of the three German batteries, and of a machine gun at much closer range, was suffering considerably. One section, the first that had come into action, fired at the hostile infantry until it was within eight hundred yards, and then withdrew. The four remaining guns were brought off by the battery commander, Major Alexander, one at a time, with the help of a party of the 9th Lancers.[3] The Norfolks Maps 3 & 6. Map 8.

[1] Actually the three battalions of the *36th Regiment* of the *IV. Corps.*

[2] The *7th Division* of the *IV. Corps.*

[3] Major Alexander received the V.C. for "handling his battery against "overwhelming odds with such conspicuous success that all his guns were "saved, notwithstanding that they had to be withdrawn by hand by him-"self and three other men." Captain Francis Grenfell, 9th Lancers, also received the V.C. on this day for gallantry in action and for assisting to save the guns of the 119th Battery.

then fell back in two parties under a continuous hail of shrapnel bullets, leaving a hundred of their wounded behind them at Élouges. Most unfortunately, both the second in command and the adjutant were wounded at this critical moment, and thus one platoon in an advanced position received no orders to retire.

Colonel Ballard sent to the Cheshire three separate messages to fall back, not one of which reached them. The major of L Battery also received no orders, but seeing no sign of the Norfolks and having fired away nearly the whole of his ammunition, was meditating withdrawal when the brigade-major of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade arrived and directed him to bring his battery out of action. The guns were thereupon run down close under the screen of the railway hedge; the limbers were brought up one by one at a gallop from Audregnies; and the battery limbered up and got away without further mishap. The party of the 4th Dragoon Guards in the house by the lane then retired also; and they, together with L Battery and the main body of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, moved off south-westward upon Ruesnes. The Cavalry Division had meanwhile fallen back towards St. Waast and Wargnies, the 4th Cavalry Brigade being further to the west between Saultain and Jenlain.

The Cheshire, together with a small party of the Norfolks, were thus left alone. The commanding officer of the former was unaware of the general retreat of the Army, so that he was at a loss to know what was expected of him. The Germans were now pressing forward rapidly upon both flanks, and about 4 P.M., while making dispositions to meet the movement, he was disabled by three wounds. Shortly before this, part of the reserve company of the Cheshire at Audregnies had been ordered by a staff officer to fall back, and, after vainly striving to rejoin the fighting line (which was rightly forbidden) made its way to Athis. Meanwhile, as the Germans came closer, the main body of the Cheshire fell back to the Audregnies road, where they were fired on by two machine guns placed in a dip in the ground, a couple of hundred yards away. These were promptly silenced by the machine guns of the Cheshire, a little party of whom charged forward with the bayonet to dislodge the enemy from this point of vantage. The Germans turned at the sight of them, and during this short respite the opportunity was taken to draw off a small part of the battalion across

country to Audregnies wood, which they reached under heavy fire, thence making their way to Athis. Then the Germans, seeing how few were their assailants, returned to the attack, and there was nothing left for the remainder of the Cheshire, a mere handful though they were, but to fight to the last. They had still ammunition and could keep up rapid fire, and though by this time separated into at least three groups, they continued to defend themselves desperately until nearly 7 P.M. Then at last, surrounded and overwhelmed on all sides, they laid down their arms. Of the main body on the Audregnies road, only forty remained unwounded. Their captors were the *72nd Infantry Regiment*, belonging to the German *IV. Corps*. 24 Aug. 1914.

The troubles of the small party that had escaped were not ended on the battlefield. The enemy broke in from Dour during their retreat, and cut off a few of them; and at Athis only one hundred of them could be assembled. The indefatigable gunners of the 5th Divisional Artillery came into action along the line Blaugies—Athis—Montignies, and again further to the south at Houdain, enabling the survivors of the flank guard to reach their bivouac at St. Waast at 9 P.M., utterly worn by hunger, fatigue and hard fighting, but still unvanquished. They had held off the pursuit of a whole German corps from the main body of the 5th Division, but at heavy cost. The 119th Battery had lost thirty officers and men; the Norfolks over two hundred and fifty officers and men; whilst of the Cheshire, who in the morning had mustered nearly a thousand, only two officers and two hundred men answered their names at St. Waast.

The total losses on the 24th August were greater than on the 23rd, and amounted to roughly 250 in the Cavalry Division, 100 in the I. Corps, 550 in the 3rd Division, 1650 in the 5th Division and 40 in the 19th Infantry Brigade.

### Summary of the Operations on the 24th August

Thus ended the first day of the retreat. All circumstances considered, although the casualties were considerable, the operations had been remarkably successful. The 5th Division had, indeed, been called upon not only to defend six miles of front, but also, with the help of the

cavalry and of the 19th Infantry Brigade, to parry von Kluck's enveloping attack; but it had triumphantly accomplished its task. The flanking battalions to the east and west had, it is true, suffered much, but only one had been actually overwhelmed, not a single gun had been lost, and the enemy had been very severely punished. Our troops were still confident that, when on anything like equal terms, they were more than a match for their opponents; the one trouble that really oppressed them was want of sleep. Long after nightfall the battalions of the 3rd Division were passing the cross roads in Bavai, the men stumbling along more like ghosts than living soldiers, unconscious of everything about them, but still moving under the magic impulse of discipline and regimental pride. Marching, they were hardly awake; halted, whether sitting or standing, they were instantly asleep. And these men on the eastern flank of the corps had done little fighting and endured little pressure during the day. Even worse was it on the western flank, where cavalry and infantry had had hard fighting from dawn till dusk, and many a man had been for over twenty-four hours without sleep or food. And this, it must be borne in mind, was only the beginning of the retreat.

Map 3. The general disposition of the Army on the night of the 24th/25th, on a line east to west through Bavai, was as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 5th Cavalry Brigade | Feignies. |
| I. Corps: | |
| 1st Division | Feignies, La Longueville. |
| 2nd Division | Bavai. |
| II. Corps: | |
| 5th Division | Bavai, St. Waast. |
| 3rd Division | St. Waast, Amfroipret, Bermeries. |
| Cavalry Division, 19th Infantry Brigade | St. Waast, Wargnies,[1] Jenlain, Saultain. |

It will be observed that in the course of the day's march, the 3rd and 5th Divisions had changed places, the latter being now on the right and the former on the left of the II. Corps. This manœuvre was intentional and carried out in accordance with orders issued for the purpose. The

[1] The 2nd Cavalry Brigade was much broken up. Headquarters, with L Battery, ½ squadron of 4th Dragoon Guards, 1½ squadrons of 9th Lancers, and one squadron of 18th Hussars, were at Ruesnes.

whole Army was inclining westward, in order to clear Maubeuge, and since the 3rd Division was able to begin its retirement considerably before the 5th, it could without difficulty proceed to the westward of Bavai, and thus shorten the retreat of the 5th Division by permitting it to fall back due south instead of south-west, and so to drop into its place on the right of the II. Corps. This movement, not only eased the immediate task of the 5th Division, but relieved it from its difficult position upon the threatened western flank; it was carried out without any collision, in fact without the divisions seeing each other. 24 Aug. 1914.

### German Movements on the 24th August 1914

The German accounts of the 24th August are somewhat meagre; all that von Kluck has to say about the day is: "After heavy fighting, the leading troops reached a line "(west to east) Onain—Élouges—Dour—Genly—Harveng. "The British force, estimated at from two to three divisions, "was driven back towards a line Curgies—Bavai." Maps 3 & 6.

He does not explain why his attempt at envelopment failed, why such a very short advance—only three and a half miles from the Canal—was made, or why his corps halted in the middle of the afternoon. His staff officer, von Kuhl,[1] states frankly "the enemy put up a lively resistance with rear guards so that we only advanced slowly." Von Kluck adds: "After the severe opposition offered by the "British Army in the two-days battle Mons—St. Ghislain, "a further and even stronger defence was to be expected on "the line Valenciennes—Bavai—Maubeuge" and he then quotes four pages from Sir John French's Despatch.

The German General Staff monograph, "Mons" gives a few details—some of which have been noticed in footnotes—and explains the absence of the *IX. Corps* from the fighting. The orders for its advance were not issued until about 8 A.M., and immediately afterwards "an "aviator brought news from which it appeared that the "enemy had left only weak infantry and artillery on the line "Ciply—Nouvelles—Givry, that numerous small columns "were in retreat to the south and south-west, and that the "enemy's artillery was in lively action with our own. At "9 A.M. the enemy's fire ceased, and the advancing infantry "encountered no more resistance, as the enemy had apparently marched off in great haste."

[1] Kuhl's "Marne," p. 72.

Nothing therefore could have been more successful than the withdrawal of the I. Corps and 3rd Division. The heavy losses inflicted on the Germans on the 23rd had not been without important results.

The sketch maps in the monograph show that in the German *III. Corps* the *6th Division* attacked Frameries and Paturages, and the *5th Division* Hornu and Boussu. Towards 5 P.M. this corps halted for the night.

In the *IV. Corps*, the *7th Division* moved through Thulin towards Élouges and the *8th*, swinging westwards, came through Quiévrain and Quiévrechain towards Audregnies and Angre, and thus, as related, struck the 5th Division flank guard. They halted in the afternoon: the *7th Division* near Élouges and the *8th* at Baisieux and northwards. No details of the fighting are given in the German account, but it is mentioned that the "British resistance was quickly broken." This statement is not borne out by time and space: it is sufficient commentary on it to remark that through a long summer's day, these two divisions made an average advance of only three miles.

Map 5. On the 24th the German *II. Corps* only reached Condé; the *II. Cavalry Corps* during the same day was moving southwards through Tournai, so that fortunately neither of these formations came in contact with the Allied forces.

Von Kluck's orders for the 25th, issued at 8 P.M., were: "Enemy's main position is believed to be Bavai—Valen-"ciennes. The *First Army* will attack it with envelopment "of the left flank, *II. Cavalry Corps* against the enemy's "rear." [1]

## NOTE

### The Operations of the French Troops on the British Left between 20th and 24th August.

(*Authorities:* Palat, Hanotaux, Dauzet, Bujac, etc.)

Maps 2 & 3. G.Q.G. instructions to General d'Amade, who took up his headquarters at Arras on 18th August 1914, were: "To establish a "barrier between Dunkerque and Maubeuge, in order to protect the "railway communications from possible raids by enemy cavalry." He was also to extend the inundations of the Scarpe, the Escaut and the Rhonelle by opening the canal sluices, and to occupy the old forts of Maulde, Flines, Curgies, Condé and Le Quesnoy.

In accordance with these instructions General d'Amade, on the 20th August, disposed his three Territorial divisions ("de campagne"

[1] Kuhl's "Marne," p. 72.

—*i.e.* excluding the Territorial divisions "de place," such as the 34th Territorial Division at Lille) as follows :— 18-24 Aug. 1914.

81st from the sea to the Lys ; Map 5.
82nd from the Lys to the Scarpe ;
84th from the Scarpe to the Sambre.

The main line of defence for the 84th was : northern edge of Bois l'Evêque (north-east of Le Cateau)—Solesmes—Villers en Cauchies — Estrun — Sensée Canal ; its advanced line being Maubeuge — Mecquignies — Wargnies — Valenciennes — junction of Escaut and Scarpe. Map 3.

On the 22nd, on the advance of the British Army west of Maubeuge, the 84th Division closed in on its left about Valenciennes, clearing the British front, and advanced to Condé. It then formed along the Schelde from Condé north-westwards to Maulde.

On the night of the 22nd/23rd the 88th Territorial Division left Choisy le Roi, near Paris, in twenty-two trains, and detrained on the morning of the 23rd at Seclin and Templeuve, near Lille. It was then ordered to march at once towards Cysoing (8 miles south-east of Lille) and then to retake Tournai, which some German cavalry had entered on the 22nd.[1] The main body of the division reached Cysoing early on the 24th, and at 9 A.M. was suddenly subjected to a heavy artillery fire from about Tournai. As the division had no artillery with it, it eventually retired towards Templeuve and Arras, after delaying the enemy some hours. Map 2.

After the German attack at Mons on the 23rd, General d'Amade reconstructed his line. At 2 A.M. (24th) the 84th Division retired from Condé through Valenciennes towards Cambrai and Marquion. During the morning of the 24th, the rear guard of the division in position near Fresnes (two miles south of Condé) was attacked and badly shaken. On the 25th, as will be seen, the division, still on the left of the British, was attacked when near Haspres and became disorganized. Map 3.

Lille was evacuated on the 24th by order of the Ministry of War,[2] and the 82nd Division took up the line La Bassée—Corbehem. The 81st Division conformed to this and was allocated the area between Aire and the sea. Thus, a barrier between the British left and the sea was still maintained. Map 2.

[1] This cavalry patrol left again within a few hours.
[2] For an account of this incident see General Percin's "Lille."

# CHAPTER V

## THE RETREAT CONTINUED : DAWN TILL DUSK, 25TH AUGUST 1914

### ORDERS FOR THE 25TH AUGUST

(See Sketch 3 ; Maps 2, 3, 9, 10 & 13)

Sketch 3. Map 3. AFTER a visit to the I. Corps and to General Sordet at Avesnes, Sir John French, on his return to G.H.Q. at Bavai in the afternoon of the 24th August, received information of the retreat of the French Third and Fourth Armies and the continuation of the retirement of the Fifth. The XVIII. Corps of the Fifth Army, immediately to the right of the British, had been attacked early, and had fallen back in good order to a line from Solre le Chateau (about ten miles south-east of Maubeuge) south-eastward to Clairfayte. Valabrègue's Group of two Reserve divisions had also fallen back south of Maubeuge.[1]

As to the western flank, the Field-Marshal had been informed that two French Reserve divisions, the 61st and 62nd (General Ebener's Group), had been sent from Paris to Arras to reinforce General d'Amade, who would thus have six divisions—some 80,000 men, without counting the garrison of Lille, 25,000—to hold a line, some 70 miles long, through Douai, Béthune and Aire to the sea. What enemy forces were before d'Amade was still unknown ; but German troops—presumably part of the *IV. Corps*—had been actually seen marching south between Valen-
Map 2. ciennes and Bavai ; and the Flying Corps in the evening reported that a large column of two divisions, in all probability the German *II. Corps*, moving west from Ath and Grammont, had wheeled southward at 10 A.M. at Lahamaide (5 miles north-west of Ath) and Ladeuze

[1] For the movements of this group, the nearest French troops on the right of the B.E.F., see Note at end of the chapter, p. 122.

(4 miles south of Ath); also that at 4.40 P.M. one of these divisions had halted at Ligne (3 miles west of Ath) to allow the other to pass it; and cavalry was known to be as far west as Tournai. The British Staff was informed that Cambrai had been entrenched, and would be held by the French, while to the west of Cambrai the strong line of the Sensée would be occupied. From the small numbers available and the nature of the troops, it could not be hoped that they would keep off for very long any serious German pressure upon the British western flank. 25 Aug. 1914.

The British Commander-in-Chief judged from the method and direction of the German attacks on the 24th that von Kluck was endeavouring not only to turn the left flank of the British force, but to press it back on to the old fortress of Maubeuge,[1] which lay to its right rear, offering asylum just as Metz had presented its shelter to the French in 1870 during the battle of Gravelotte. He was not, however, inclined to be thus tempted, and, as the left of the French XVIII. Corps was already ten miles in rear of the British right, decided to continue the retreat on the 25th some fifteen miles further, to a position in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau.

The routes for this retirement of the British Force presented some difficulty. Bavai is the crossing place of two ancient highways, the Chausée Brunehaut, running from south-east to north-west, and another, known as the Roman Road, running from south-west to north-east; in the southern angle enclosed between them lies the Forest of Mormal. This was then a compact and well-cared-for block of woodland, mostly oak and beech, with an extreme length of nine miles and an average breadth of from three to four. On its western side the Roman Road forms its boundary for some seven miles; from east to west several fair roads, one main road and a railway cross it; and, in addition, the Bavai—Pont sur Sambre and the Englefontaine—Landrecies roads run respectively just north and south of it; but there is no road through it from north to south: the numerous forest tracks shown on the map were narrow and unmetalled, or at best had only a thin layer of unrolled stones. With the uncorrected maps then at the disposal of the British Force, Map 3. Map 10.

[1] This was actually the case. Von Kluck's orders for the 24th ran—"The attack is to be so carried out that the enemy will be thrown back on "Maubeuge and his retreat to the west cut off" (Kluck, p. 45).

a commander might well hesitate before involving his columns, with an enemy on their heels, in so large and blind a mass of trees.[1] Just east of the Forest runs the Sambre, with many loops and windings, with a general course south-west to north-east, but without, as might have been expected, a main road following the line of its valley: the Maubeuge — Leval — Landrecies road, the nearest to the river, was from half to two miles east of it. Consequently, if the river were crossed (as circumstances dictated that it must be crossed by the I. Corps as close to Maubeuge as possible), it must be recrossed before that corps could be re-united with the II.

The situation presented to the British Commander-in-Chief was, through the mere accident of topography, most embarrassing. To pass the whole of his Army to the west of the Forest would mean, practically, a flank march across the front of an enemy greatly superior in numbers and already threatening his western flank; to pass entirely to the east of it was impossible owing to the proximity of the French. Sir Douglas Haig was communicated with on the subject of avoiding the Forest, and at 5.45 P.M. on the 24th he wrote to the Commander-in Chief that he would be able to march at 5 A.M. on the 25th along the roads near the Sambre, and therefore could leave the Roman Road to the II. Corps. He added that his march would bring the head of his corps as far as Landrecies.

The Commander-in-Chief decided therefore to divide the British Force, and send the I. Corps east and the II. Corps west of the Forest, and at 8.25 P.M. issued orders for the retirement, with a notification that the exact positions to be occupied at Le Cateau would be pointed out on the ground.[2] The movement was to be commenced so that all rear guards would be clear of the Bavai —Eth road by 5.30 A.M. on the 25th. In the G.H.Q. operation orders the Roman Road, Bavai—Montay (just north-west of Le Cateau) was made the boundary between the I. and II. Corps and assigned to the II. Corps; so that the I. Corps was responsible for the Forest of Mormal.

Maps 3 & 13.

[1] The leading German corps avoided crossing the Forest from north to south. The *III. Corps* sent advanced guards by two of the transverse roads from west to east to secure the eastern edge; and the *IV. Corps* also sent a column from west to east by the road south of the Forest to Landrecies, as will be seen. The *IX. Corps* crossed it with infinite precautions by the main road from Berlaimont from east to west, two days after the battle of Le Cateau. The next corps to the east, the *X. Reserve* (at Etreux on the 27th), with Richthofen's *Cavalry Corps*, moved well to the east of the Forest.

[2] Appendix 13.

The various orders for moving the Force south-westwards may be summarized as follows : 25 Aug. 1914.

I. Corps : to move in two columns, and billet in villages on the route.

1st Division : to cross the Sambre at Hautmont and proceed thence southward by Limont Fontaine, Ecuelin and Monceau to Dompierre and villages beyond.

2nd Division : to cross the Sambre at Pont sur Sambre and Berlaimont, and billet in the area from Leval south-west to Landrecies.

5th Cavalry Brigade (attached I. Corps) : to cover the above movements, follow the march of the 2nd Division and billet in the area from Leval northward to Bachant.

II. Corps : to fall back west of the Forest of Mormal to the line Le Cateau—Caudry—Haucourt, by three roads. Further details are given below.

Cavalry Division (with 19th Infantry Brigade attached) :

Two brigades, with II. Corps Cavalry attached, under a special commander, to cover the retreat of the II. Corps ; two brigades, with the 19th Infantry Brigade, under G.O.C. Cavalry Division, to guard the western flank.

In the course of the 22nd/23rd the 4th Division, having been relieved of its duties on the east coast of Great Britain by Yeomanry Mounted Brigades, Territorial cyclists and other units, had crossed the Channel to the ports of Havre, Rouen and Boulogne, and by the 24th eleven battalions of infantry and one brigade of artillery, the bulk of the combatants, had arrived by train at Le Cateau and the neighbouring stations. They were ordered to move forward and occupy a position at Solesmes to assist the retirement of the II. Corps. Major-General Snow subsequently received orders to withdraw when the time came to the left of the II. Corps on the Le Cateau position.

## Movements on the 25th August

### The I. Corps

In the right centre the 5th Cavalry Brigade, in the early hours of the 25th, took over the outposts of the 2nd Division from La Longueville to Bavai, which had been attacked, though not in force. A troop was sent out eastwards to gain touch with the outposts of the 1st Division, and it ascertained that the French 53rd Reserve Maps 3 & 13.

Division was retiring upon Hautmont, the very place selected for the 1st Division to cross the Sambre. From Feignies to Hautmont the 1st Division was confined to a single, narrow, high-banked, dusty road, and when the river had been passed at the allotted bridge the French 53rd Reserve Division shared with it the road from Hautmont to Dompierre and Marbaix.[1] The weather was extremely hot, and the march, broken as it was by constant checks owing to the number of troops on the road, was greatly distressing to soldiers already much worn by fatigue and want of sleep. Otherwise the column was little disturbed, except by occasional bullets from German patrols,
Map 9. and the division reached its billets, in a line of villages west of Avesnes :—the 1st (Guards) Brigade at Dompierre, the 2nd at Marbaix, which was shared with the French 53rd Reserve Division, and the 3rd at Le Grand Fayt.

The 2nd Division, moving to Noyelles — Maroilles — Landrecies, south of the Forest of Mormal, on the west of the 1st, had a better road from La Longueville to its bridges at Berlaimont and Pont sur Sambre ; the rear guard, supplied by the 6th Infantry Brigade, was only followed by dismounted cavalry and was little pressed. But it too had trouble, for Maroilles was the supply re-filling point of the French 53rd and 69th Reserve Divisions ; and no one could tell the British Staff which roads the supply columns would use after re-filling. Moreover, the tail of General Sordet's Cavalry Corps was using the road from Maroilles to Landrecies on its way to Le Cateau, and this meant further congestion. However, the 4th (Guards) Brigade duly reached Landrecies about 4 P.M. ; and the 6th Infantry Brigade reached Maroilles about 6 P.M. ; the 5th was detained till evening to guard the passages of the Sambre from Pont sur Sambre to Sassegnies (west of Leval) until it could be relieved by French troops, and did not reach Noyelles till midnight.

Sir Douglas Haig soon after 2 P.M. had established his headquarters at Landrecies ; here a message despatched

[1] General Palat, in an article entitled "Le Maréchal French et le Général Lanrezac" in the "Anglo-French Review," November 1919, stated that the mistake was the I. Corps' and that it got on the roads assigned to the Reserve division ; but no allotment of roads as between the British and the French can be traced before a memorandum dated 10 A.M. on the 26th. Similar mishaps as regards allotment of roads between Armies occurred on the German side, according to General Baumgarten-Crusius in his "Marneschlacht," due to there being no intermediate commander between Supreme Headquarters and the Armies, as there was later on in the war.

from G.H.Q. soon after 3 P.M. reached him informing him that the II. Corps was occupying the Le Cateau position from Caudry to Inchy, including, temporarily, the I. Corps' part of Inchy, and asked him when he would be able to take up the line from Inchy south-eastward to St. Benin (1¾ miles south of Le Cateau). His answer was urgently requested, since the orders for the 26th depended upon it. 25 Aug. 1914.

General Haig realized that the situation was serious, for, about noon, the Flying Corps had reported German columns to be closing on Bavai. Meantime, his chief General Staff officer, Brigadier-General J. E. Gough, had gone to G.H.Q. and returned with instructions, in accordance with which he ordered the march of the I. Corps to be resumed at 2 A.M. on the 26th: that of the 1st Division to St. Martin (5 miles south of Le Cateau), the 2nd to Bazuel (2 miles south-east of Le Cateau), the whole movement to be covered by the 5th Cavalry Brigade. Orders, issued at 7.30 P.M. by G.H.Q., were, however, received subsequently, and they directed that the retirement was to be continued a little further and that the I. Corps was to go on to Bussigny (7 miles south-west of Le Cateau).[1] The reason of the change was that in view of the reports received of the further retirement of the French on his right and of the strength of the enemy on his own immediate front, Sir John French had decided that he could not stand on the Le Cateau position, but must continue the retreat on St. Quentin and Noyon.

## The II. Corps

The II. Corps had made every preparation for a very early start on the 25th in its retirement south-west from Bavai to the Le Cateau position; but owing to the passage of General Sordet's Cavalry Corps from east to west across its line of retreat, the roads to the south were blocked, and there was much difficulty in getting the whole of the transport into motion by midnight, the hour fixed in orders. The process was not, in fact, accomplished without the delay of a full hour, with the result that the fighting troops were also that much behind their time. The 5th Division was allotted the Roman Road, immediately west of the Forest of Mormal; the Maps 3 & 13.

[1] Appendix 14.

14th Infantry Brigade formed its rear guard. The 3rd Division was to march on the west of the 5th Division on two roads as follows :

9th Infantry Brigade via Gommegnies (three miles north-east of Le Quesnoy)—Salesches—Vendegies au Bois ;
8th Infantry Brigade via Wargnies le Petit—Le Quesnoy—Salesches—Viesly ; followed by the
7th Infantry Brigade as rear guard.

The 19th Infantry Brigade and the Cavalry Division were to move still further west by Villers Pol, Ruesnes, Vertain, Romeries and Solesmes, thus passing a couple of miles west of Le Quesnoy ; their function was to cover the rear and protect the western flank of the II. Corps.

It will be remembered that the 4th Division had been ordered to occupy a position in the vicinity of Solesmes to assist the retirement of the II. Corps, though not actually under its orders. The division accordingly marched northward from its detraining stations at 1 A.M. to carry out the role assigned to it.

The main body of the 5th Division moved off at 3 A.M., but the rear guard was obliged to push some way northward towards Bellignies (3 miles north-west of Bavai), to cover the withdrawal of its guns from St. Waast through Bavai: a flank march, though short, across the enemy's front, which the nature of the country made inevitable. There was a brush with German troops about Breaugies (just south of Bellignies) and a second encounter near Bavai, where the guns of the XV. Brigade R.F.A. came into action with good effect. By 6.30 A.M.—just one hour late—the bulk of the rear guard had crossed the road Bavai—Eth, when, dropping into the Roman Road, it was no further troubled ; the Germans followed it up at no great distance, but never pressed the pursuit.

Further to the west, the main body of the 3rd Division moved off at 5 A.M., the rear guard taking up a line from the Roman Road westward through Bermeries to Wargnies le Petit, where its left was in touch with General Allenby's command. The ground on the west flank of the British, over which the Cavalry Division was working, is cut into a series of ridges by four streams, which flow in a north-westerly direction into the Upper Schelde between Bouchain and Cambrai. Across this ground from north-east to south-west runs the straight line of the Bavai—Cambrai road, and from north to south the Valenciennes—Solesmes

—Le Cateau road. The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades were extended from Wargnies beyond Jenlain, with the 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades to their left rear between Maresches and Préseau, all on the first ridge; and the 19th Infantry Brigade, again to the left rear, on the next ridge between Sepmeries and Quérénaing. 25 Aug. 1914.

The operations which now ensued on the west flank may be summarized as a running fight during which the Germans closed in, following the II. Corps and Cavalry Division, so that at night their advanced troops were practically in contact with the British.

The 7th Infantry Brigade, the rear guard of the 3rd Division, began its retirement upon Le Quesnoy without seeing any sign of the enemy; and a reconnaissance pushed north-west to Famars, on the outskirts of Valenciennes, could also find nothing of him. On the other hand, bodies of French Territorial troops, belonging to General d'Amade's 84th Territorial Division, originally at Condé, were met retreating southward from Valenciennes, which indicated the evacuation of that town, and the prospect of increasing pressure from the enemy on the west. Reports from the Flying Corps pointed to the same conclusion: the head of a very large column—apparently a corps (the *IV.*)—had been seen at Quiévrechain (5 miles north-east of Valenciennes) at 7.30 A.M. Another column of cavalry and guns, three miles in length (evidently two regiments, part of the *II. Corps*), was moving south from Somain (12 miles west of Valenciennes), and its head had reached Bouchain (11 miles south-west of Valenciennes) at 6 A.M. Lastly, between 9 and 10 A.M. Divisional Cavalry reported that parties of the enemy, presumably cavalry, were on the road between Haspres and Saulzoir (9 miles south by west of Valenciennes), and that they had passed along the main road from Valenciennes to Cambrai and struck south from the neighbourhood of Denain. It appears that the British cavalry was barely in contact with the enemy at the outset; but the menace to the western flank of the force and to the retreating French Territorials caused the 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades to be sent westwards to Quérénaing and beyond it to Verchain, thus covering the second ridge already referred to. The 1st Cavalry Brigade also moved north of them in the same direction, through Artres (4 miles south of Valenciennes) where it was heavily, though ineffectively, shelled.

At the same time, the 19th Infantry Brigade was moved

by General Allenby south-west over the third ridge to Haussy in the valley south of it. At Quérénaing French gendarmes reported the information that large German forces were moving south-east from Bouchain, and this news was confirmed by the sound of heavy firing about Avesnes le Sec (south-west of the last-named village), and only four miles from the 19th Infantry Brigade. The 16th Lancers were therefore sent, about noon, to Haspres and Saulzoir to help the French Territorials; but from Saulzoir they were driven back by artillery fire and withdrew south-eastwards to rejoin the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. Meanwhile, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, left alone in the north, had fallen back southward, not very hard pressed, first to a line between Villers Pol and Le Quesnoy, and then, in succession, to Ruesnes, Capelle sur Écaillon and Vertain, east of the 19th Infantry Brigade.

The 4th Division had been in position since 5 A.M. immediately to the south of Solesmes: the 11th Infantry Brigade on the right, on the spur to the south-east of the town; the 10th Infantry Brigade on the left, near the farm of Fontaine au Tertre (two miles south-west of Solesmes); and the 12th Infantry Brigade, in reserve, in rear at Viesly. It was of the utmost importance that Solesmes should be strongly held, for upon it the principal highways from the north-east, north and north-west, all converged; and, soon after noon, a huge mass of British transport was struggling to pass through it by roads which were already seriously congested by a crowd of refugees. These, with every kind of vehicle from six-horse farm wagons to perambulators, everywhere delayed the marching troops, and made it impossible for motor cars carrying Staff officers to pass the columns.

The further operations of the cavalry had all the characteristics of a prolonged rear-guard action.[1] Eventually

[1] General Allenby's opponents on this day, von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps*, spent the night of the 24th/25th :—*2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* at Marchiennes (16 miles north of Cambrai and about the same distance from the British flank), and the *4th Cavalry Division* at Orchies (4 miles north of Marchiennes). The corps orders for the 25th were for "an overtaking pursuit," and the divisions were given as their respective objectives the three towns lying to the south-west, one behind the other: Le Cateau, Solesmes and Haspres. This line of march brought them in on the flank of the British, but too late to be effective. It is claimed that charges were made against the French Territorials; but, except for "a street fight" in Haspres, about 3 P.M., "after which the *9th Cavalry Division* spent the night there," the *II. Cavalry Corps*, according to the German records, employed only artillery fire against the British ("Deutsche Kavallerie," pp. 51-55).

the 1st, 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades under increasing shell fire from the enemy, fell back along the third of the ridges between the Selle and the Harpies. The French 84th Territorial Division was found retreating southward across this ridge, and liaison was arranged with it; but the pressure upon the British cavalry seemed at one time so heavy that the 19th Infantry Brigade was brought up on to the ridge from Haussy and deployed, in order to relieve it. The Germans, however, were held back with no great difficulty; and the 19th Infantry Brigade, between 2 and 3 P.M., resumed its way southward to Solesmes, while the bulk of the cavalry and horse artillery, having for the time-being shaken off the enemy, was collected and massed to the east of Vertain (3 miles north-east of Solesmes). Here, between 3 and 4 P.M., they were suddenly assailed by a storm of German shells from the north-east as well as from the north; and the division, being cramped for space, moved across country by brigades and still smaller bodies, after detailing rear guards to cover the passage of the infantry through Vertain and Solesmes. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade drew off south-east, leaving behind the greater part of the 4th Hussars, with instructions to gain touch with the I. Corps; part of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, including its headquarters, took the same route; the 1st Cavalry Brigade fell back to the high ground immediately south-east of Solesmes, and the 4th, with other portions of the Cavalry Division, remained in the vicinity of that town. 25 Aug. 1914.

Meanwhile, the rear guard of the 3rd Division (7th Infantry Brigade) was gradually coming in from Le Quesnoy to Solesmes, and by 5.45 P.M. its head had reached the point where the roads from Romeries, Vertain and Vendegies meet immediately to the north of Solesmes. There the 1/Wiltshire and 2/South Lancashire halted and deployed, whilst the 3/Worcestershire occupied a covering position to the south of Solesmes between the 10th and 11th Infantry Brigades. The 2/Irish Rifles and a section of the 41st Battery, the rear party of the rear guard, having been warned of strong German forces moving on Le Quesnoy, were following the rest of the 7th Infantry Brigade slowly and with every precaution, and at this time were at Pont à Pierres, on the main road, a couple of miles to the north-east of Romeries. The 19th Infantry Brigade about the same time was passing west of Solesmes, through St. Python, and began to make its way

up the Selle Valley by Briastre and Neuvilly towards Le Cateau. The 4th Cavalry Brigade, together with the detachments of other mounted troops near Solesmes that had joined it, fell back by St. Python south-west upon Viesly, soon after the Wiltshire and South Lancashire (7th Infantry Brigade) had been deployed. By 6 P.M., or soon after, these two battalions were the only troops north of Solesmes, whilst the 4th Division still held its original position on the high ground to the south of that town, with orders from G.H.Q. to cover the retirement of the
Map 9. 3rd Division, Cavalry Division and 19th Infantry Brigade.

The stifling heat of the day had about 5 P.M. given place to a thunderstorm; the light began to fail very early and the rain streamed down in torrents. Through this downpour, between 6 and 7 P.M., the remainder of the 3rd Division, drenched to the skin, hungry and weary, marched into their billets on the Le Cateau position: the 8th Infantry Brigade to Audencourt and the 9th to Inchy.

The main body of the 5th Division came in earlier, between 3 and 5 P.M., on the right of the 3rd: the 13th Infantry Brigade between Le Cateau and Troisvilles, and the 15th to Troisvilles, west of it. The march along the Roman Road had been most trying, for the sun beat fiercely upon the interminable length of the straight, white, dusty road, and under the tall trees of the Forest of Mormal there was not a breath of air to relieve the stifling heat. The 13th Infantry Brigade was delayed for some time just outside Le Cateau to allow six regiments and a cyclist battalion of General Sordet's Cavalry Corps to pass over the railway bridge on their way westward. As soon as the rear guard, the 14th Infantry Brigade, which had been little troubled, came in between 5.30 and 6.30 P.M., the Cornwall Light Infantry and half of the East Surreys[1] were sent to the east of Le Cateau to establish connection with the I. Corps, while the Suffolks and the Manchesters were diverted a little westward to the other side of the Selle valley astride the Roman Road just north of Montay. Here, with two batteries of the XXVIII. Brigade R.F.A., they entrenched in order to keep the Germans at a distance upon that side.

As darkness began to close in, the 7th Infantry Brigade,

[1] The two remaining companies under Major Tew had been misdirected on the evening of the 24th, and had spent the night at Eth, from which place they marched by Ruesnes, Vertain and Solesmes to Viesly, where they arrived between 5 and 6 P.M.

the 4th Division, and half of the Cavalry Division were still engaged, or in position to engage, with the enemy near Solesmes; the 19th Infantry Brigade and the remainder of the Cavalry Division were still far from their halting places for the night; the 5th Division and part of the 3rd Division had, however, reached their destinations on the Le Cateau position. From front and left flank, the Germans appeared to be closing in, but at a respectful distance without affording the British the satisfaction of seeing the results of their good shooting. It would indeed have alleviated the fatigue of the men, tired out as they were with deployments upon rear-guard positions which were never attacked, had they had more fighting; but the Germans never really came within rifle shot and rarely gave even the guns a target. 25 Aug. 1914.

### Movements of the German *First* and *Second Armies* from 23rd to 25th August 1914

Until the 27th August inclusive, the German *First* and *Second Armies* were both under the orders of von Bülow, the commander of the *Second Army*, and they appear to have had no other directions from Supreme Headquarters than those issued on the 18th August: Map 3.

"The *First* and *Second Armies*, combined under the "command of Generaloberst von Bülow, will have their "advanced guards across the Brussels—Namur railway by "the 20th August, when they will wheel southwards"—that is they were to continue the great wheel pivoting on Thionville laid down in the initial directions.[1]

On the 23rd August, after the battles of Charleroi[2] and Mons, von Bülow, in his instructions for the 24th, directed the *First Army* to continue the attack on the British and "to send the *IX. Corps* round the west side of Maubeuge "as soon as possible, with the *II. Corps* in echelon behind "it, in order to envelop the left flank of the French Fifth "Army." This, he says, could not be carried out because the British offered "renewed" resistance on the 24th.

The German *Second Army*, with von Richthofen's *Cavalry Corps*, continuing the pursuit of the French Fifth Army on that day, reached in the evening an east and west line between Dinant and Maubeuge, and detailed the *VII. Corps*, the right of its line, to watch the south-eastern side of the French fortress. Von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps*

[1] Kluck, p. 9.

[2] See p. 85.

was sent towards Tournai and Denain "to attack the British left flank."

On the 25th, the *First Army* was to continue the attack against the British, enveloping their left wing; "but the enemy, by a cleverly executed retirement, "evaded the *First Army*, in spite of the latter's brilliant "marching performances."[1]

The *Second Army* continued the pursuit of the French, but in a south-westerly direction, so that at night the heads of its four corps were roughly on a south-east and north-west line passing through Solre le Chateau. Maubeuge was invested by the *VII. Corps* on the south-east and by the *IX. Corps* (of the *First Army*) on the north-west—

"Strong portions of the *14th Division* were, if possible, "to advance round the south of Maubeuge against the rear "of the British, in the direction of Aulnoye"

and

"the *I. Cavalry Corps* was also ordered to push forward in "a westerly direction via Aulnoye to hinder the retreat of "the British."

But neither infantry nor cavalry got within a march of Aulnoye and, in any case, the British were six miles south of that place on the evening of the 25th August.

Thus it was that on this day the British were not in contact with the German *Second Army*; of their collision with the *First Army* the next chapter will tell.

On the same day General von Gallwitz, who was in charge of the siege of Namur (with the *Guard Reserve* and *XI. Corps*, the inner flank corps of the *Second* and *Third Armies*), was able to report that, except for a few forts on the south-west front, the fortress was in his hands. So that there was every prospect of these corps becoming available in the near future.

## NOTE

### Movements of General Valabrègue's Group of Reserve divisions of the French Fifth Army, immediately on the right of the B.E.F.

The following were the movements of General Valabrègue's Group, 21st-25th August, as given in General Palat's "La Grande

[1] The movements of the *First Army* are described further on p. 130 *et seq.*

Guerre sur le Front Occidental," vol. iii. pp. 301-2, 318, 326. They are of interest, as this group was the nearest French formation of all arms on the right of the British Forces. 22-25 Aug. 1914.

On the 22nd August, General Valabrègue still had his head-quarters at Avesnes (10 miles south of Maubeuge). On the evening of the 21st, the 69th Reserve Division commenced a movement north-east on Beaumont and Cousolre (13 miles and 10 miles east of Maubeuge, respectively). On the 22nd at 9 P.M. the group received orders not to go so far east, but to march northwards towards the Sambre, so as to have its left on the fortress of Maubeuge, and its right on the road Solre sur Sambre—Beaumont, facing north-east. Its march was much impeded by the crowds of refugees on the roads. Map 3.

On the 23rd the orders to the group were slightly changed: it was to go further northwards and prevent the passage of the Sambre near Solre sur Sambre; for this purpose it was to take up a position south of the river between Montignies and the Bois de Jeumont, 69th Reserve Division on the right, 53rd Reserve Division on the left, headquarters at Solre le Chateau (10 miles south-east of Maubeuge). These orders were in course of execution, when news came of the attack on the British at Mons. Towards 5 P.M. it also became known that the left flank of the French XVIII. Corps had been attacked near Thuin, and that it was necessary to support it. The 69th Reserve Division was then ordered north-eastwards towards Thirimont—Bousignies (both two miles to the north of Beaumont) and the 53rd, on its left, towards Cousolre, the result of which was to widen the gap between the Group Valabrègue and the British Expeditionary Force.

On the 24th, after an engagement in which the 53rd Reserve Division took part, the Group Valabrègue retired, moving past the east and south fronts of Maubeuge. On the 25th it continued its retreat by Dompierre to the north-west of Avesnes. It was thus abreast of and in touch with the British, in fact, as already related, it came into collision on the roads with the I. Corps, and the 53rd Reserve Division, as will appear later, supported that corps when attacked at Maroilles.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RETREAT CONTINUED : EVENING AND NIGHT OF THE 25TH/26TH AUGUST 1914

(See Sketch 3 ; Maps 3, 9, & 10)

### Maroilles and Landrecies

Sketch 3. Map 9. With the fall of dusk in the I. Corps area, stories brought by refugees began to circulate in the villages, in which the British were settling down, of the approach of the Germans to Maroilles and Landrecies, near which places lay the two main passages over the Sambre at the southern end of the Forest of Mormal. Sir Douglas Haig had taken every precaution against a hostile attack from the Forest upon his western flank during his retreat : the bridge over the Sambre, which lies to the north-west of Maroilles and carries the road from Le Quesnoy south-eastward through the Forest by Locquignol to Maroilles, was guarded by a troop of the 15th Hussars. Another troop watched a lock bridge some two miles farther down the river. Infantry was to relieve the cavalry at night : at Maroilles the passages of the Sambre were to be held by the 6th Infantry Brigade ; and those near Landrecies by the 4th (Guards) Brigade. On the right of the I. Corps were General Valabrègue's Reserve divisions. From all reports, the enemy was not within striking distance,[1] and so little were the rumours believed that an officer of the 15th Hussars was denied permission by the local civil authorities to destroy some wooden buildings, which obstructed his view near Maroilles Bridge, on the ground that no Germans were anywhere near him. Suddenly, about 5.30 P.M., there was a panic amongst the inhabitants of Landrecies, caused by cries that the Germans were upon them. The

[1] According to the statements of German officers, the enemy seems to have been equally unaware of our presence at Landrecies and Maroilles (see footnote 1, p. 126).

troops promptly got under arms, and two companies of the 3/Coldstream took post at the road-junction near the railway about half a mile to the north-west of the town, and mounted patrols were sent out, but without finding any enemy. At Maroilles half an hour later (about 6 P.M.) German patrols [1] engaged the two detachments of the 15th Hussars, but were easily held at bay for an hour, when the assailants of the road bridge brought up a field gun and, creeping forward under cover of the very buildings which the British officer had wished to destroy, compelled the troop to fall back. As it retired towards Maroilles, it was met by a company of the 1/Royal Berkshire which was coming up in relief. The infantry took post by the Rue des Juifs about a mile to the south-east of the bridge. The Germans challenging in French succeeded in enticing a British officer forward and making a prisoner of him; but they made no further advance and presently retired. 25 Aug. 1914.

In Maroilles itself there was for a time such a congestion of supply lorries and of refugees with their vehicles, that the three remaining companies of the Royal Berkshire could only march off after considerable delay to the support of the company at the Rue des Juifs. When these companies at last came up, they found that the enemy had retired, and accordingly pushed on to recover the lost bridge. The only access to this, however, was by a causeway over marshy ground, and the enemy having barricaded the bridge and put his field gun into position, the Royal Berkshire failed to drive him from it. After suffering a total loss of over sixty men, it was decided to make no further attempt to recapture the bridge until daylight; they were therefore obliged to content themselves with forbidding advance along the causeway.

Meanwhile at Landrecies there had also been fighting. The patrols returned with the report that all was clear and the 4th (Guards) Brigade was confirmed in its belief that the first alarm at 5.30 P.M. had been a false one. The exodus of inhabitants, however, still continued, and subsequent events proved that the rumour was true. It seems that the advanced guard of the German *IV. Corps* [2]—an

[1] The force that came to Maroilles was the *48th Infantry Regiment* of the *5th Division, III. Corps*, the advanced guard of the *5th Division* (see footnote 4, p. 131).

[2] Kuhl, "Marne," p. 73, definitely states that the troops which "encountered resistance" at Landrecies belonged to the *IV. Corps*. The original report that it was part of the *IX. Corps* appears to have been due to an identification received by wireless from the Eiffel Tower, Paris. For the German movements on the 25th see pp. 130-32 below.

infantry brigade (the *14th*) with a battery—had marched from Le Quesnoy past the south of the Forest towards Landrecies for the purpose of billeting there, entirely ignorant of the presence of the British. On discovering the town was occupied, the vanguard crept along the hedges and corn-stooks, and entrenched themselves parallel to the road not five hundred yards from the line of the two advanced companies of the 3/Coldstream. They even loop-holed a garden wall still closer to those companies. At 7.30 P.M. No. 3 Company of the 3/Coldstream was on piquet, on the road, with a machine gun upon each flank, and wire entanglements a short distance ahead. Wheels and horses were heard approaching along the road;[1] and the sentry challenged. The challenge was answered in French; a body of men loomed through the darkness, and the officer in command advanced to question them. He was answered always in French, but in the course of the parley the supposed Frenchmen edged themselves up closer to the piquet, and then, suddenly and without the slightest warning, lowered their bayonets and charged. In the first moment of surprise, they knocked down the officer, seized the right-hand machine gun and dragged it away ten yards, but a few seconds later they were swept away by a volley from the piquet, and the machine gun was recovered.

The piquet was at once reinforced; and the rest of the 4th (Guards) Brigade turned out, the 2/Grenadiers coming up to the support of the Coldstream along the road from the railway northwards. Charge after charge was made by the enemy without gaining any advantage, and at 8.30 P.M. German artillery opened fire upon the town and upon the piquet. This fire was accurate, but the German infantry-men shot far too high and accomplished little, until, having by means of incendiary bombs set light to some straw-stacks in a farmyard close to the British, they apparently realized for the first time, by the light of the flames, that their way was barred only by a single thin line.[2] Thereupon they tried, but unsuccessfully, to enfilade the Guards. The engagement went on until past midnight when a

[1] This, according to the story of a German general who was present, was the regimental transport which was ordered to trot past the column to get to the billets.

[2] Lance-Corporal G. H. Wyatt, 3rd Coldstream Guards, dashed at and extinguished the burning straw, though the enemy was only 25 yards distant. For this and a further act of bravery at Villers Cotterêts on 1st September, he received the Victoria Cross.

howitzer of the 60th Battery was brought up by hand within close range and with its third round silenced the German guns. This seems to have decided the issue; and the enemy drew off. The losses of the 3/Coldstream were one hundred and twenty; those of the Germans, according to their official casualty lists, were 127.[1] By about 4 A.M. on the 26th, all was again quiet on the line of the I. Corps. 25 Aug. 1914.

But, as it was impossible in the dark to discover the scope of the attack, the information sent back to G.H.Q. from the I. Corps was somewhat alarming. It stated at 1.35 A.M. that the situation was very critical, and at 3.50 A.M., it was suggested that the troops near Le Cateau should assist by advancing straight on Landrecies. Although the situation was soon restored and better news sent, all this, and the uncertainty as to what the Forest of Mormal might conceal, tended to confirm the view of G.H.Q. that the continuation of the retirement was the proper course.

## The II. Corps. The Rear-Guard Action of Solesmes

The labours of the II. Corps lasted to as late an hour on the night of the 25th/26th as those of the I. Corps. All through the evening the stream of transport flowed slowly and uneasily through Solesmes, and shortly before dark the Germans closed more resolutely on the South Lancashire and Wiltshire (7th Infantry Brigade), the rear guard of the 3rd Division before that town, and brought their artillery up to close range, though pushing forward only small bodies of infantry. They did not, however, really press hard and, when darkness fell, went into bivouac. This enabled the two battalions to be withdrawn, much scattered, indeed, and with the loss of several small detach- Map 9

[1] The following information was obtained from Berlin in 1921:
The German forces involved in the fighting at Landrecies consisted of the *14th Infantry Brigade* (Major-General von Oven) of the *IV. Corps*, containing the *27th* and *165th Infantry Regiments*, one squadron *10th Hussars*, and the *4th Field Artillery Regiment*. Of these the *165th Infantry Regiment* and three batteries were only employed in the later stages of the fight.

Casualties: *27th Inf. Rgt.*—1 officer, 32 men killed,
4 officers, 65 men wounded;
*165th Inf. Rgt.*—3 men wounded,
2 men missing;
*10th Hussars*—1 man wounded;
*4th Field Artillery Rgt.*—3 officers and 16 men killed;
total casualties, 127.

See also footnote 1, p. 132.

ments cut off by the enemy, but without further mishap.[1] The 4th Division meanwhile stood fast on the heights immediately south of Solesmes, while the mass of transport and troops disentangled itself on the roads leading south and south-east upon Caudry and Le Cateau. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade, with the headquarters and portions of the 2nd, pushed through the congested streets of Le Cateau on to Catillon, where it halted for the night between 10 and 11 P.M. The 1st Cavalry Brigade bivouacked in the fields south of Le Cateau, with the exception of the 5th Dragoon Guards, who retired after dark to Inchy and thence shortly before midnight to Troisvilles, west of Le Cateau, their horses utterly exhausted. The 19th Infantry Brigade, together with two companies of the Scots Fusiliers which had lost connection with the rear guard of the 9th Infantry Brigade, marched into Le Cateau at 10 P.M. and bivouacked in the central square and at the goods station. The bulk of the 7th Infantry Brigade retired to Caudry, but the Irish Rifles and the 41st Battery, the last party of the rear guard, only reached Le Cateau about 10 P.M., when finding they could not rejoin their brigades direct, owing to the rapid advance of the enemy, they passed southward to Reumont, where they bivouacked at 2 A.M. on the 26th. At least one detachment of the Wiltshire, having with some difficulty avoided capture, also found its way into Le Cateau in the early hours of the 26th. The masses of troops, guns and transport at dusk and for many hours afterwards pressing through the northern entrance to the town created extraordinary congestion. The British alone would have sufficed to crowd it, and besides the British a considerable body of French Chasseurs[2] marched in from Valenciennes. The mile of road from Montay to Le Cateau falls very steeply and becomes a defile, and here infantry, cavalry, guns and wagons, in places three abreast, were jammed together in what seemed irremediable confusion.

[1] Both infantry brigades of the German *8th Division* (*IV. Corps*) and the *4th Cavalry Division* had casualties at Solesmes on 25th August (see "Schlachten und Gefechte").

The action seems to have been regarded as a serious one by the Germans, for the official name of "The Battle of Solesmes and Le Cateau" is given to the fighting on 25th/27th August 1914. Von Kluck states: "The "*IV. Corps* was able to attack the British troops at Solesmes, but they did "not evacuate the village until after nightfall, after putting up an obstinate "resistance." So unexpected was this that v. Kluck himself arrived in the town during the fight, having selected it as his night quarters.

[2] The narrative of Colonel H. L. James, 2/Manchester, is the authority for this statement.

Had the Germans pushed on, even with a small force supported by guns, they might have done terrible damage, for one or two shells would have sufficed to produce a complete block on the road; the rear parties of the Suffolks and Manchesters (14th Infantry Brigade), rear guard of the 5th Division, had been withdrawn at dusk, and there would have been nothing to stop an enterprising enemy. But the Germans were no less weary than the British, and they had also gained sufficient experience of British rapid fire to make them cautious. They had gone into bivouac here as at Solesmes; and though at dusk they were in force only five miles away,[1] they left the British free to disentangle themselves at their leisure. The process was long and tedious, and until a late hour Viesly was as hopelessly blocked as Solesmes had been. 25 Aug. 1914.

Though the 4th Division had been unmolested since dusk, except by one or two cavalry patrols which were quickly driven off, it was not free to begin to move off until 9 P.M. During its detention near Solesmes the remainder of its Divisional Artillery, except the Heavy Battery, had been detraining, and the 2/Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, which had not come up with the 12th Infantry Brigade, arrived at Ligny, where it took over guard of the divisional transport. In view of the flank march that the division would later have to make to its new position on the left of the Le Cateau line, two companies of this battalion were in the afternoon sent as a western flank guard to occupy Bévillers and Beauvois. A hasty reconnaissance of the new ground was made by Brigadier-General Haldane, and he selected a good reverse-slope position, or, as it was then called, "back position," covering Haucourt. Map 10.

At 5 P.M. 4th Division warning orders for the march to and occupation of the position were issued.[2] A G.H.Q. alteration, sent out at 6.40 P.M., reduced the length of front to be held, and made it from Fontaine au Pire to Wambaix, that is to say about three miles. The orders directed that the 11th and 12th Infantry Brigades should hold the front line, with the 10th in reserve at Haucourt, whilst the artillery should assemble at Ligny.

The artillery (with the exception of the XXXII. Brigade, which was with the rear guard) arrived fairly early

[1] This would appear to be part of the *IV. Corps* which spent the night at Bousies and adjoining villages, with the main body of the *III.* behind it at Jolimetz and beyond.

[2] Appendix 15.

in the evening; the 12th Infantry Brigade moved off from the heights above Solesmes soon after 9 P.M.; the 11th, an hour later; and the 10th Infantry Brigade, which could not move until the 3rd Division got clear of Briastre, at midnight. As the three brigades marched off south-west rain was falling heavily and the darkness was only relieved on the northern horizon by the red glow of villages fired by the enemy. Meantime, instructions from G.H.Q., received in the afternoon, intimated that the retirement would probably be continued at 7 A.M. next morning, but it was on the position above defined that the troops of the 4th Division stood when the first shots were fired in the early morning of the 26th.

The head of General Sordet's Cavalry Corps had passed through Ligny, behind the Le Cateau position, in the course of the day, and the corps bivouacked for the night near Walincourt. The end of his long march and his arrival on the western flank of the British was, perhaps, the one cheerful feature in a gloomy situation.

### The Movements of the German *First Army* on the 25th August 1914

Map 3. Von Kluck's book and the special sketch-map for the 25th/26th August which he has provided make it perfectly clear how there came to be collisions between the British and the Germans at Maroilles, Landrecies and Solesmes on the night of the 25th/26th.

On the evening of the 24th August he issued operation orders in the expectation that the British Army would accept battle on the line Maubeuge—Bavai—Valenciennes, making his plans for a "Cannae" on a small scale. His *IX. Corps* was to attack against Bavai, that is against General Haig, and guard against any interference from Maubeuge; the *III. Corps* against St. Vaast—Wargnies, that is against General Smith-Dorrien; the *IV. Corps* was to envelop the British western flank; and the *II. Cavalry Corps* was to work round in rear of the British and cut off their retreat "westwards." With the *II. Corps* only a march in rear and close to Condé, and the *IV. Reserve Corps* following on, "the envelopment of the British Army, provided it stood, seemed certain."

The *First Army* Staff appears to have been considerably misled by air reports. Those of the evening of the 24th and early morning of the 25th gave "the impression of a

general retreat on Maubeuge" :[1]—columns were converging on Bavai, and the roads from Le Quesnoy to the south and south-west, as well as the main roads through the Forest of Mormal were reported clear of troops. At 7.15 A.M. orders were sent out by motor car for the *II.*, *III.* and *IV. Corps* to wheel southwards on Aulnoye, Landrecies and Le Cateau, and the *II. Cavalry Corps* to advance to the area north-west of Guise. "It was hoped to cut off the British and then turn against the left flank of the French." 25 Aug. 1914.

At 9 A.M., however, the "surprising air report" arrived that long columns were moving from Bavai on Le Cateau by the Roman Road and that numerous small columns were crossing the Selle, north and south of Solesmes. "The "enemy was marching in an almost opposite direction to "what was supposed earlier in the morning." Fresh orders were rapidly sent out to attack the British and prevent their further retreat :—The *II. Cavalry Corps* was to head them off, the *III. Corps* to make its right (west) column stronger, the *IV. Corps* to march with its right wing on Solesmes—Le Cateau, with the *II. Corps* west of it. The *IX. Corps* was to continue opposite Maubeuge covering the movement.

In accordance with these orders, the *IX. Corps* wheeled south-eastwards from Bavai and commenced investing Maubeuge.[2] The *III. Corps*, passing over the old front of Smith-Dorrien's corps, St. Vaast—Wargnies, in two divisional columns, pushed its advanced guards through the Forest of Mormal south-eastwards by the two good roads which lead to Berlaimont and Maroilles. At night the *5th Division* billeted and bivouacked in the Forest, along the high road Maroilles—Le Quesnoy, in the area Hachette (near the bridge over the Sambre 2 miles N.N.W. of Maroilles)—Locquignol—Jolimetz ;[3] and the leading troops of its advanced guard came in contact with the 1/Royal Berkshire of the 6th Infantry Brigade, as already related.[4] The *6th Division* halted north of the *5th Division*, with half its troops on either side of the Forest :—the *11th Brigade* and part of the divisional troops in the area, west of the Forest, between Villereau—Gommegnies Map 9.

[1] Kuhl's "Marne," p. 73.

[2] There is a good account of the investment of Maubeuge by the *IX. Corps* on the 25th August, the blocking of the roads, construction of entanglements, etc., in Tepp's "In Siegessturm nach Paris."

[3] This information was obtained in Berlin in January 1922.

[4] See p. 125. The III. Battalion of the *48th Infantry Regiment* was in action at Maroilles (Kaupert's "Das Infanterie-Regiment No. 48," p. 16).

—Amfroipret and the border of the Forest; the *12th Brigade* and the rest of the divisional troops in the area, east of the Forest, La Grande Carrière—Aymeries—Berlaimont—Sassegnies.

The *IV. Corps*, marching due south, also advanced in two columns, one via Le Quesnoy and then past the south-west boundary of the Forest of Mormal to Landrecies, and the other via Valenciennes to Solesmes. Thus they came in contact with the British 2nd [1] and 3rd Divisions. The *II. Cavalry Corps* billeted four to eight miles east of Cambrai, around Avesnes lez Aubert.

Map 3. Of the German *Second Army*, as already noticed, the *VII. Corps* was detailed to invest the eastern side of Maubeuge. The *X. Reserve Corps* was near Solre le Chateau on the night of the 25th/26th August, and its head, together with the *I. Cavalry Corps*, only reached Marbaix (roughly the right of the British front on the night of the 25th/26th) late on the 26th.[2]

Map 9. Thus it was that on the evening of the 25th, the German *II. Cavalry Corps* and *IV.* and *III. Corps* were close enough to the British to be able to strike in force at Le Cateau in the early morning, whilst the *IV. Reserve*, *II.* and *X. Reserve* were within a march of the field, with parts of the *IX.* and *VII. Corps*, drawn from the investment of Maubeuge, available in case of need.

### First Belgian Sortie from Antwerp, the 24th, 25th and 26th August

Map 2. It is convenient to notice here that during the 24th, 25th and 26th August the Belgian Army, in order to assist the French and British troops fighting on the Sambre and

[1] The following extract from a book by Oberleutnant Dr. Lohrisch, published in 1917, entitled "Im Siegessturm von Lüttich an die Marne," throws a little light on Landrecies. His battalion (*I.* of the *27th Infantry Regiment*) marched on the 25th via Le Quesnoy to Bousies (four miles north-west of Landrecies), where it halted for the night. He continues—"Our advanced guard stumbled on the enemy at Landrecies, and the *II.* "and *III. Battalions*, which were billeted at Robersart and Fontaine au "Bois (west of Bousies), and two of our companies were sent forward in the "direction of the little town. . . . At 5.45 A.M. (on the 26th) the regiment "was ordered to capture Landrecies, as the tired troops sent forward the "night before, on account of difficulties caused by the darkness and ignor-"ance of the ground, had been compelled to stop their operations."

[2] See von Bülow and Vogel. On the night of the 25th/26th the *Guard Cavalry Division* was at Liessies (12 miles east of Marbaix), and the *2nd Cavalry Division* at Sivry, 6 miles behind it ("Deutsche Kavallerie," pp. 70, 71).

on the Mons Canal, made a sortie against the German corps observing Antwerp, with a view to detaining them there, and, if possible, acting against the German communications passing through Louvain and Brussels. 25 Aug. 1914.

On the 24th a reconnaissance was made, and on the 25th four divisions, with a fifth division and the cavalry division in reserve, attacked southwards from Malines towards the gap between Louvain and Brussels. Good progress was made, and the fight continued on the 26th, when information from Paris of the withdrawal of the French and British forces having been received, and also of the intention of General Joffre to resume the offensive at a later date, it was decided to adopt a similar course and retire into Antwerp.

As will be seen, the second Belgian sortie took place during the Battle of the Marne.

### The Situation at Midnight 25th/26th August

At 7.30 P.M. on the 25th August the British Commander-in-Chief, who had at 6 P.M. established his headquarters at St. Quentin, issued his orders—without, of course, having the exact information as to the enemy which has just been given—for the retreat to be continued ten to fifteen miles to the south-west on the morrow.[1] According to these orders, the I. Corps was to use the road from Le Cateau to Busigny and take up its billets in the area of Busigny; the II. Corps was to billet about Prémont and Beaurevoir, and the 4th Division at Le Catelet. Communications from General Joffre admitted that his attempt at the offensive had failed, and that his intention was to retire to the line Laon—La Fère—St. Quentin, and from this position to take the offensive again. There seemed little time to lose. The enemy was in touch with the British at several places, and had considerable forces within a few miles of them. The Germans were known to be pushing troops with all speed towards the western flank of the British, where General d'Amade's six Reserve and Territorial divisions guarded the long line to the sea. The I. Corps had already been struck at Maroilles and at Landrecies, the II. at Solesmes; and it was not difficult to guess what these blows might portend. Sir Douglas Haig's troops stood to arms all night, losing the rest of which they were so much in need; and it was feared that the attack at Landrecies might mean Map 3.

[1] Appendix 14.

that the Germans were already in force across the southern end of the Forest of Mormal, between Landrecies and the Roman Road.[1] It will be remembered that on the afternoon of the 25th Sir Douglas Haig had issued instructions for the I. Corps to march at 2 A.M. to the right of the Le Cateau position.[2] These orders he cancelled on receiving those of the Field-Marshal to continue on to Busigny.

### General Sir H. Smith-Dorrien's Decision

Map 9. Only a sketch would give an idea how the various units of the II. Corps had been jostled between the barrier of the Forest of Mormal, which edged them away to the west, and the pressure of the enemy on the western flank, which bore them back towards the east. To General Smith-Dorrien the true situation did not reveal itself until late at night. At 10.15 P.M. he too had issued orders for the renewal of the retreat to the line prescribed by Sir John French: the transport to start at 4 A.M. and the main bodies at 7 A.M.[3]

Meantime, the divisions of his corps, acting on his previous order, were in readiness on or near the Le Cateau position: the 3rd Division, under orders issued at 9.42 P.M., was to stand to arms at 4 A.M. and be prepared to occupy the sections of the position allotted in case of attack; and two and a half infantry brigades of the 5th Division were bivouacking on a line across the Troisvilles—Le Cateau roads, with the remaining two battalions posted on the high ground north-east of Le Cateau to connect with the I. Corps as originally arranged; this division had orders to stand to arms at 3.30 A.M.

G.H.Q. orders for the continuance of the retreat, and for the Cavalry Division to cover it on the north and west,[4] had not reached General Allenby at his headquarters at Beaumont until after 11 P.M. Shortly after their receipt, Lieut.-Colonel Ansell of the 5th Dragoon Guards came in to report that his regiment and the 4th Division had safely withdrawn from the high ground north of Viesly, which overlooks Solesmes, and that the enemy was in possession of it. As it was this high ground and the ridges abreast of it that the cavalry must occupy to cover the initial stages of the retirement from the Le Cateau position, and General Allenby had not sufficient force—in fact, only

[1] The German *8th Division* was there, with the *5th Division* in rear of it.
[2] See p. 115. [3] Appendix 16. [4] Appendix 14.

the 4th Cavalry Brigade—under his hand to recapture it, he proceeded at once to General Smith-Dorrien's headquarters at Bertry. There he explained the situation, and expressed the opinion that, the Germans being so close, unless the troops of the II. Corps and 4th Division could march "before daylight," the enemy would be upon them before they could start, and it would be necessary to fight. General Smith-Dorrien thereupon at 2 A.M. sent for General Hubert Hamilton, commanding the 3rd Division, whose headquarters were close at hand, and asked him if it was possible to get on the move during the hours of darkness. His reply was that many units of the division were only just coming in, and that he did not think that he could get them formed up for retreat before 9 A.M. General Allenby further said that his division was too much scattered and exhausted to be able to give useful assistance in covering the retreat next day.[1] General Smith-Dorrien, after a full discussion of the situation with Generals Allenby and Hamilton, reluctantly came to the decision that he must stand his ground. To do this he must ask the commanders of the Cavalry Division and of the 4th Division to place themselves under his orders; and with them and with the II. Corps —that is to say, with the whole of the British troops in the line from Catillon westwards—he would strike the enemy hard, and, after he had done so, continue the retreat. Whether he could withdraw his troops after such a stand would depend on the pressure and weight of the German attack. Several German cavalry divisions, and the head of a division of the German *IV. Corps* were already before him, the British I. Corps had been attacked by another corps, and further forces were known to be hurrying up. Much would obviously depend on breaking off the action before overwhelming numbers of the enemy became effective. To guard his flanks he had to depend upon the weary and sorely tried Cavalry Division, with some possibility of assistance on the western flank from General Sordet's equally weary Cavalry Corps, and on the eastern flank from the I. Corps, should it not be held fast itself. Help from this quarter, however, appeared unlikely, and indeed Sir Douglas Haig at 3.50 A.M. asked for assistance from the II. Corps. The situation, in short,

26 Aug. 1914.

[1] The I. Corps was equally "exhausted, and could not get further in without rest"; and therefore could not come "further west so as to fill the gap between Le Cateau and Landrecies." (See Sir John French's Despatch, 7th September 1914.)

seemed to him one that could be saved only by desperate measures. General Allenby promptly accepted the invitation to act under his command; General Snow of the 4th Division there was no doubt would do likewise when the request reached him.

A lengthy message was despatched by II. Corps at 3.30 A.M. to G.H.Q. St. Quentin, by motor car, which was received there about 5 A.M., informing Sir John French in detail of the decision taken. At 5 A.M. another message was sent asking that General Sordet might be told that the II. Corps was not retiring. The first message was acknowledged by a reply, sent off from G.H.Q. at 5 A.M.,[1] which, after giving the latest information, concluded :—

"If you can hold your ground the situation appears "likely to improve. 4th Division must co-operate. "French troops are taking offensive on right of I. Corps. "Although you are given a free hand as to method this "telegram is not intended to convey the impression that "I am not as anxious for you to carry out the retirement "and you must make every endeavour to do so."

Shortly after 6 A.M. Sir H. Smith-Dorrien communicated further with G.H.Q. by the railway telephone; and G.H.Q. warned the 4th Division that the II. Corps might not be able to continue the retirement at the time arranged and that it was to cover Sir H. Smith-Dorrien's left flank.

The die having been cast, it remained only for General Smith-Dorrien to inform his subordinates. As General Hubert Hamilton had been present at the conference, this was easy as regards the 3rd Division; to Sir Charles Fergusson he went himself about 4 A.M. and whilst he was discussing the situation the commander of the 5th Division drew his attention to the fact that formed bodies, the rear guard of the 3rd Division, were still coming in, dead beat. The actual orders to stand fast, which were conveyed by two staff officers in a motor car, reached 5th Divisional Headquarters shortly afterwards. A staff officer was sent to the 4th Division, but did not arrive at Haucourt until 5 A.M., only a short time before the division became engaged. The news that came in meanwhile to II. Corps Headquarters was not reassuring. At 2.30 A.M. General Smith-Dorrien heard that the Germans had occupied

[1] This is the hour given on the message form and in the Operations file, but comparison with the times of other messages indicates that it must have been later.

Cambrai; and at 3.45 A.M. that they were working round to the south of Landrecies. These details were neither of them true; but, true or false, they could not affect his resolution.[1] 26 Aug. 1914.

Seeing that many of the brigades had only lately come in, it was inevitable that the divisional commanders should have considerable difficulty in communicating the order to stand fast to their brigadiers, owing to the uncertainty of their whereabouts: General Shaw of the 9th Infantry Brigade, being in Beaumont, received the order through General Allenby at 3.30 A.M.; the 7th and 8th Infantry Brigades, having stood to arms at 4 A.M., were actually on the position and improving trenches when fired on at 6 A.M. There is no record of the order not to retire at 7 A.M. reaching them. Of the 5th Division, Count Gleichen of the 15th Infantry Brigade, being nearest to Divisional Headquarters, heard at 5 A.M., and the other two infantry brigadiers about 6 A.M.

### The Arrival of the 4th Division in its Position

We left the 4th Division marching through the darkness to take up its position on the extreme left of General Smith-Dorrien's line between Fontaine au Pire and Wambaix, with its reserve at Haucourt.[2] The first of the troops to reach their destination, about 1 A.M., were the headquarters and two companies of the 2/Inniskilling which had left Ligny shortly before midnight to secure Esnes (5 miles south-east of Cambrai). There they found a small party of General Sordet's cavalry which had barricaded the western approaches to the village. The two remaining companies of the battalion, it will be recalled, had been detached as a flank guard to Beauvois and Bévillers (both about four miles north-east of Esnes) on the afternoon of the 25th. Just after darkness fell, the outposts before Bévillers were suddenly aware of a troop of German horse, which came within thirty yards of them before it was recognized to be hostile, and was followed by six motor lorries full of infantry. The Inniskillings opened rapid fire, with what effect could not be seen, but the enemy retired in haste. The two companies remained in their positions until 3 A.M. when, by order of Map 9.

[1] Actually, the French 84th Territorial Division was in occupation of Cambrai and its northern approaches.

[2] See p. 130.

their brigadier, they marched for Longsart (just north-west of Haucourt). Meanwhile, the advanced guard of the 12th Infantry Brigade—two companies of the Essex—which had left Béthencourt at 10 P.M., reached Longsart about 3.30 A.M., and the 2/Lancashire Fusiliers came in a little later. Both parties entrenched themselves on the plateau just to the north-west of the hamlet. The 1/King's Own reached the eastern end of Haucourt shortly after 4 A.M. and halted there, General Sordet's rear guard riding through the village during the halt. At 4.30 A.M. the two remaining companies of the Essex passed their comrades on the way to Haucourt; and towards 5 A.M. the advanced companies of the Inniskillings also came in to Longsart. Thus by 5 A.M. the whole of the 12th Infantry Brigade had reached its allotted ground. During these hours the 10th Infantry Brigade was also approaching its position in reserve at Haucourt, hungry, wet and weary after its hurried journey to Le Cateau by train, its equally hurried march to Solesmes, and its heavy duties as rear guard to the 4th Division. It had entered Caudry at the first streak of dawn, and by 4.30 A.M. had arrived at Haucourt, where the men threw themselves down and slept, hoping that, being in reserve to the division, they might have a little rest. A French cavalry patrol returning shortly before 5 A.M. reported that the front was clear, but there was no means of verifying this except by using the horses of field officers and the Staff, for reasons which will appear.

Meanwhile, the 11th Infantry Brigade had reached Fontaine au Pire, on the right of the 12th, at 2.45 A.M., and halted at its northern end. Its rear guard—two companies of the 1/Somerset Light Infantry—then passed through it on its way to Ligny, and the 1/Rifle Brigade found the outposts at the northern end of Beauvois (Beauvois and Fontaine au Pire are actually one long straggling village), whilst the rest of the brigade slept. At 5 A.M. the battalions were just moving off to their place in the line when German guns opened upon the troops to the north of Beauvois. No enemy was to be seen except a few cavalry; so the 1/Rifle Brigade occupied a position to the north-west of the village, while detachments of the three remaining battalions covered its northern and north-eastern approaches. Under cover of this screen, the main body of the brigade fell back and occupied a line south-westward from the "Quarry (Carrières)" (a little

to the south-west of Fontaine), with its left battalion, the 1/Hampshire, astride the railway. 26 Aug. 1914.

Thus, by 5 A.M. on the 26th, the infantry of the 4th Division had to all intents occupied the positions assigned to it for the night of the 25th/26th, although, owing to the darkness, it had settled down on the forward instead of the reverse slope. The artillery was not in battle position, as the Divisional Artillery Commander was with Divisional Headquarters and therefore expected to resume the retirement at 7 A.M.

Though complete in field artillery and infantry, the 4th Division was as yet without its Divisional Cavalry [1] and Cyclists, Heavy Battery, Field Engineers, Signal Company,[2] Train, Ammunition Column and Field Ambulances. Hence there were no mounted troops to furnish patrols or covering parties, no 60-pdrs. to mow down the enemy before deployment as was done with such striking effect by the Heavy Battery of the 5th Division on the right, no engineers to superintend working parties, very limited means of attending to wounded, no means of removing them, and, above all, no means of controlling from divisional headquarters the general movements of some fifteen thousand men, extended along a front of five miles, except by the use of mounted officers and orderlies. The ground on which the 4th Division lay, on the left of the British line, was a dreary boggy moor, soaked by the rain of the previous night, and in many places churned into deep mud by the passage of men, horses, guns and vehicles ; and over such a surface horses, already none too fresh, were soon exhausted by a few hard gallops.

The 4th Division had received instructions, brought by an officer from G.H.Q. at midnight, to continue the retreat to Le Catelet, but the orders for the march had not been issued to the brigades, for they were all on the move. At 5 A.M. officers were sent out to ascertain the positions of the troops, and the orders were ready to be despatched

[1] The Divisional Cavalry (one squadron of the 19th Hussars) reached St. Quentin by train on the morning of the 26th and marched at 4.30 A.M. It was, however, intercepted by the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, and ordered to join it, being formed into a composite regiment with another of its own squadrons (Divisional Cavalry of the 5th Division), and half a squadron of the 4th Dragoon Guards. Had it been free to march to its own division, however, it could not have reached it in time to carry out the essential service of reconnaissance to the front.

[2] The Headquarters Section of a Divisional Signal Company contained three cable sections with telephone equipment, motor cyclists, push cyclists, mounted men, heliographs and other means of communication.

as soon as the officers reported, should the situation permit retirement. Almost immediately after this, Captain Walcot arrived from General Smith-Dorrien to announce his decision to stand and request that the 4th Division would cover his flank. General Snow agreed to do so, and at 5.30 A.M. sent messages to his brigades to take up the positions already ordered, and to the 11th Infantry Brigade to get in touch with the 3rd Division. Shortly after this the officers who had been to them returned reporting, to use the words of one of them, that the infantry were already "at it hammer and tongs."

# CHAPTER VII

## THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU—26TH AUGUST: DAWN TILL NOON

### FORMATION OF THE LINE OF BATTLE

(See Sketch 3; Maps 10 & 11[1])

THE 26th August, the anniversary of Crécy, dawned hot and misty, with some prospect that the historic weather of A.D. 1346 would be repeated, and the certainty that in an almost similarly desperate situation, the stout hearts of our island race would again ensure triumph over superiority of numbers, and rob the enemy of what he considered an easy prey. Sketch 3. Map 10.

It may be recalled that although in the first instance it was the intention of G.H.Q. to occupy a position in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, a subsequent order directed the retreat to be continued.[2] It was upon the original understanding and in expectation that the I. Corps would

[1] After Map 11 had been struck off, additional information with regard to the situation of the German forces was obtained. The following corrections should therefore be made, in green, commencing on the East:—

(1) For "Advance of head of *III. Corps*" read "Advance of *5th Division*."

(2) The *6th Division* should be shown on the Roman Road, with its head at Forest (5,000 yards north-east of Le Cateau), "about 7 P.M."

(3) The following should be substituted for the information about the German cavalry and *Jäger*:—

The *4th Cavalry Division* attacking against Béthencourt from the north; front from about Prayelle to a little north-east of Jeune Bois.

(4) *13th* and *14th Cavalry Brigades* of the *9th Cavalry Division* attacking against Caudry from the north; front Jeune Bois to south-east corner of Beauvais.

(5) *19th Cavalry Brigade* of the *9th Cavalry Division*, with *3*, *9*, and *10 Jäger Battalions*, attacking against Fontaine au Pire from north-west; front from southern end of Beauvais, halfway to the railway station south of Cattenières.

(6) *2nd Cavalry Division*, with *4th* and *7th Jäger Battalions*, attacking against Longsart, from the north-west; front from right of *9th Cavalry Division* to one mile north of Esnes.

[2] See p. 115.

be in touch with it on the east, that the dispositions of the troops on the ground were made by the II. Corps. Although officers had been sent ahead to reconnoitre the position, most of the units did not come on to it until dark, and heavy rain interfered with the observation of those which reached it earlier in the day. Moreover it was difficult to identify places by the map, for the only one then available was the French uncontoured hachured map of the 1 : 80,000 scale, to which British officers were not accustomed. When the troops stood to arms about 4 A.M. under orders to continue the retreat, there was a heavy ground mist, so that, though the troops were approximately in position, there was little opportunity, or apparent necessity, to rectify the line and choose the best ground to repel a determined attack by superior numbers.

The town of Le Cateau lies deep in the narrow valley of the river Selle, surrounded on all sides by open cultivated country and occasional moor, with never a fence, except in the immediate vicinity of the villages, and hardly a tree, except along the chaussées. The river, though small, is unfordable. The heights on the east, crescent shaped, slightly overlook those on the west, the highest ground of which is roughly a T in plan : the head (the Reumont ridge), running north to south, from Viesly to Reumont, and the stalk (the Le Cateau position or Caudry ridge) east to west from Le Cateau to Crêvecœur. The reverse or south side of the Caudry ridge drops sharply to the Warnelle stream, with higher undulating country behind it, dotted with villages and woods, admirably suited to cover a retirement. The front or north side is broken by a succession of long spurs running northwards ; the western end drops to the Schelde Canal.

Except for the Selle river and the Canal with its accompanying stream, the country was free for the movement of troops of all arms, and, from its open character, generally suited to defensive action, though there were numerous small valleys up which enterprising and well-trained infantry could approach unseen. Beetroots and clover covered part of the ground, but the other crops had mostly been cut and partly harvested. Here and there were lines of cattle, picketed Flanders fashion, in the forage patches. Crops had been held so sacred at British manœuvres that there was occasionally hesitation before troops, particularly mounted troops, would move across them.

The town of Le Cateau on the right of the line of the II. Corps was at 4.30 A.M. still full of British transport, though the long columns, after protracted delay owing to the passage of General Sordet's Cavalry Corps across them, had for hours been pushing south-westwards along the Roman Road. The 19th Infantry Brigade, placed under the II. Corps by G.H.Q. orders of the previous night, had not yet received any message postponing the retreat, as its headquarters could not be found in the dark; it was delayed nearly two hours in starting by the congestion in the streets, and had hardly got clear—being the last troops to leave the town—when shortly after 6 A.M. the first German scouts made their appearance in Le Cateau. There was some firing, but they were easily kept at a distance, and the brigade eventually pursued its march to Reumont with hardly a casualty. The 1/Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and half of the 1/East Surrey (14th Infantry Brigade), which had bivouacked on the heights to the east of Le Cateau, and had likewise received no orders to stand fast, were at this time formed up in column of route by the railway bridge near the south-eastern corner of the town, facing west and ready to march off at 6.30 A.M. The remainder of the 14th Infantry Brigade had meanwhile occupied a position immediately to the west of Le Cateau: the Suffolks across the centre of the spur—which for convenience may be called the Montay Spur—which runs from the Reumont ridge north-eastward to Montay, and the other one and a half battalions south of them. Next to the 14th Infantry Brigade, but separated from it by a small valley between spurs, came the Yorkshire Light Infantry of the 13th Infantry Brigade, with the XV. Brigade R.F.A. and the 37th Howitzer Battery in close support on the right, and the XXVIII. Brigade R.F.A. in close support on the left. West of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, the Scottish Borderers of the same brigade occupied the next ridge of rising ground; and west of them again, the 15th Infantry Brigade prolonged the line to the road that leads from Troisvilles to Inchy, with the XXVII. Brigade R.F.A. in rear of it to the east and south-east of Troisvilles. Of the rest of the artillery of the 5th Division, the 61st Howitzer Battery and 108th Heavy Battery took up positions of observation about a mile to the north of Reumont, while the 65th Howitzer Battery unlimbered to the south-west of Troisvilles. In reserve near Reumont

26 Aug. 1914.

Map 11.

was the 19th Infantry Brigade, as orders to halt there reached it soon after it left Le Cateau.

The battalions of the 14th Infantry Brigade which lay west of Le Cateau did not receive their counter-orders to stand fast until about 6 A.M., and those to the east of the town never received them at all. Hence the 5th Division was in a manner surprised, and compelled to accept battle in positions which were being held with a view to slipping away under cover of rear guards. The Suffolks in particular, who lay immediately to the west of Le Cateau, were badly placed for a general action: there was much dead ground on every side; the field of fire was for the most part limited and could nowhere be called good; and small valleys and sunken roads at sundry points gave hostile infantry every opportunity of concealing their approach. The battalion, in common with the other troops of the 5th Division, made shift to throw up such entrenchments as it could with its "grubbers," no better tools being obtainable. The XXVII. R.F.A. had time to dig in its batteries; but the XV. Brigade for the most part had to be content to mask its guns with corn-sheaves.

But the serious difficulties in which the 5th Division became involved during the action of the 26th August arose not so much from the lack of preparation of the position, as from its belief that the I. Corps would be on its right, and hold the high ground east of Le Cateau, whence an enemy could rake a considerable portion of the line. The risk that this ground would fall into German hands had to be accepted by Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien when, late indeed but as early as in the circumstances it was possible to come to a decision, he resolved to stand and fight.

Passing now to the dispositions of the 3rd Division, the 9th Infantry Brigade took up the line from Troisvilles westward to Audencourt. The brigadier, as has been told, had received timely notice of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's intentions and, bringing his battalions early into position, enabled them to improve some mathematically straight trenches which had been hastily begun by French civilians, and to dig themselves fair shelter. The XXIII. Brigade R.F.A. was in close support on the reverse side of the ridge, with two sections dug in on the forward slope, one of the 107th Battery to the right front, and one of the 108th Battery on the left rear of the Lincolnshire, the left of the brigade. About a thousand yards

to the south of these batteries was the 65th Howitzer Battery, and about five hundred yards to the west of them the 48th Heavy Battery. 26 Aug. 1914.

Next on the left of the 9th Infantry Brigade stood the 8th Infantry Brigade, holding Audencourt and the ground thence westward to Caudry. This brigade also was partly dug in, having taken in hand at dawn the work of improving and extending some trenches made by French civilians.

The 7th Infantry Brigade occupied Caudry and its vicinity. The right of the position along the ridge to the north-east of the town was held by the 1/Wiltshire; an enclosure near Point 129, just north of the town, by the 2/South Lancashire and the 56th Field Co. R.E.; and the remainder of the line along the north and north-western outskirts by the 3/Worcestershire. The battalions of the 7th Infantry Brigade were very weak, many men having lost their way in the dark during the retirement from Solesmes. The Irish Rifles, indeed, had not yet rejoined, being still at Maurois with the 41st Battery. A divisional reserve was formed of men collected from First Line Transport, Signal Sections, etc.

Of the rest of the 3rd Divisional Artillery, the XL. Brigade R.F.A. was in readiness south-west of Audencourt; two batteries of the XLII. Brigade R.F.A. at the north-eastern corner of Caudry; a section of I Battery R.H.A. at the north-western corner; and the XXX. Howitzer Brigade just south of the buildings of Caudry facing north-west. Speaking generally, the 3rd Division was better posted and more fully prepared for action than either the 5th Division on its right or the 4th on its left, having received earlier warning of what was expected of it.

Between Caudry and Beauvois there was a gap; this, however, was of no importance, since it could be swept by crossfire from the two villages; and at Beauvois itself the rear guard of the 11th Infantry Brigade was still bickering with the advanced parties of the enemy. Its main body, as already described, was aligned from the east of the "Quarry" south-west towards the Warnelle ravine; and by this time the King's Own had crossed the ravine from Haucourt, and was halted in mass near the cross roads five hundred yards north-east of Longsart, thus filling the gap between the 11th and 12th Infantry Brigades.

In reserve to General Smith-Dorrien's force there were nominally the Cavalry Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade; orders were issued for the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Brigades to proceed to Bazuel and Mazinghien (2 miles east by south and 4 miles south-east of Le Cateau respectively), to guard the right flank; whilst the 1st Cavalry Brigade was to take post at Escaufourt, about four miles south-west of Le Cateau. The 4th Cavalry Brigade, which had moved at midnight to Inchy, fell back to Ligny at dawn. But the orders to the cavalry were for the most part very difficult to execute, for only the 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades were more or less complete and concentrated, and they were at opposite ends of the line. As it happened, however, part of the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades, as well as the 3rd Brigade, were in the vicinity of Le Cateau and thus available to cover the gap between the I. and II. Corps.

The situation as it appeared to the Germans at night is fully disclosed by von Kluck's operation orders issued at 11.50 P.M. on the 25th August. In them he ordered "the continuation of the pursuit of the beaten enemy" in a general south-westerly direction:—His right, the *II. Corps*, via Cambrai on Bapaume; the *IV. Reserve Corps* (then at Valenciennes) starting early, via Vendegies to Cattenières; the *IV. Corps* via Caudry and Montay to Vendhuille; the *III. Corps* via Le Cateau to Maretz. The *IX. Corps* was still in rear observing the western front of Maubeuge and protecting the Lines of Communication against sorties from it; it was to send any troops it could spare after the *III. Corps*. Orders for the three cavalry divisions of von der Marwitz's *Corps* are not given, but von Kluck's narrative states that in the early morning they attacked via Wambaix—Beauvois—Quievy,[1] drove the enemy south and held him until the heads of the corps appeared. It was then his intention to envelop the British Force on both flanks. From von Kluck's own account, he seems to have been under a complete misconception of the situation in the morning. He thought, when it was found that the British were not retiring, that they were holding a more or less north and south

[1] The orders in "Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 55, are for the *II. Cavalry Corps* to move due south against the great Roman Road:
*2nd Cavalry Division*, with *4th* and *7th Jäger*, via Carnières—Esnes (practically Wambaix).
*9th Cavalry Division*, with *3rd*, *9th* and *10th Jäger*, via Beauvois.
*4th Cavalry Division*, via Caudry (due south of Quievy).

position (he ordered "the *IV. Corps* to envelop the northern ; 26 Aug. 1914.
the *III. Corps* the southern flank of the position"), and were trying "to draw off in a westerly direction"; and he lost sight of the I. Corps altogether. Possibly, the extension of the British front westwards by the newly arrived 4th Division helped to mislead him. Further, that front at nightfall was established by contact on the line Landrecies — Solesmes facing north-east; and the move of the 4th Division from Solesmes during the night, practically in contact with the Germans, was south-west. Possibly he thought the whole force was following the same direction. This, of course, fitted in with his preconceived idea that the British Expeditionary Force was based on Ostend, Dunkirk and Calais.

In the German *Second Army*, von Bülow also issued operation orders that "on the 26th the pursuit of the "beaten enemy should be continued in a south-westerly "direction with the greatest possible energy." As he had to leave the *VII. Corps* to observe the eastern side of Maubeuge, the *X. Reserve Corps* now became his right. This corps only reached Marbaix on the 26th and did not get into contact with the British until it struck the rear guard of the I. Corps (the 1st (Guards) Brigade) at Étreux on the 27th.

## The Battle

### *The Right of the Line.*

Very soon after 6 A.M., while the morning mist was still Map 11.
thick, the German batteries opened fire for the first time from the vicinity of Forest (3 miles N.N.E. of Le Cateau)[1] upon the troops immediately west of Le Cateau, thereby putting a stop to entrenching except so far as it could be carried on by the men lying down, with their "grubbers." The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and two companies of the East Surreys were, as has been told, waiting in column of route in Le Cateau, by the railway bridge in the Faubourg de Landrecies when, at 6.30 A.M., exactly the time that they should have moved off, heavy rifle fire was opened upon them from the windows of the neighbouring houses. Several men fell; but the detachment, under the covering fire of the Signal Section and some of

[1] These would appear to have been *IV. Corps* batteries, but possibly there were some *III. Corps* ones.

the headquarters of the 14th Infantry Brigade, were rapidly led back through a succession of wire fences to the high ground above the south-eastern corner of Le Cateau. Here the six companies formed a firing line north and south athwart the cross roads just to the south of the Faubourg de France. How the Germans had contrived to reach the south-eastern outskirts of Le Cateau without being seen, is unknown ;[1] but the fact remains that, when the action opened, the Germans were in the town on the flank of the II. Corps, with every prospect of cutting off the detachment of the 14th Infantry Brigade which lay on the east of the town, and of pouring through the gap between the I. and II. Corps. They lost no time, in fact, in following up that detachment, which, however, under cover of a counter-attack by the half-battalion of the East Surreys, fell back south-east by successive companies along the road towards Bazuel, repelling simultaneous attacks against its front and its right flank. A mile from Bazuel, however, portions of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, followed by the 3rd with D Battery, came to its help ; and with their support the Cornwall Light Infantry and East Surreys began to move westward to rejoin their brigade soon after 8 A.M. The Germans, favoured by the mist, had by this time worked up the valley of the Selle southward from Le Cateau, for about a mile, with no very clear idea, probably, of what was going forward, when they were caught by this counter-attack on their eastern flank, and for a time their progress seems to have been arrested.

Meanwhile fresh German batteries had opened fire from a concealed position near Rambourlieux Farm (2 miles W.N.W. of Le Cateau) against the troops between Le Cateau and the Roman Road, now the right of the British line, and practically enfiladed the whole of them with most destructive effect. The British guns replied as well as they could with nothing but the flashes to guide them, for, though the German aeroplanes were active in this quarter of the field, British machines were not employed in aid of the artillery. The infantry, having no targets as yet, was obliged to endure the bombardment passively, though comparatively early in the day—that is to say, soon after 8 A.M.—German skirmishers climbed

[1] They had not far to come, as Bousies and villages round it, only four miles from Le Cateau, were occupied by part of the German *7th Division* on the night of the 25th/26th ; it marched off at 5 A.M. (Lohrisch).

to Point 150 on the summit of the Montay Spur, and began firing at the British gunners. Upon these, and also upon a concealed German machine gun on the Cambrai road the left company of the Suffolks opened fire; but there was some doubt as to the situation, for it never occurred to any of the officers that the high ground immediately to the east and west of Le Cateau would be left open to free occupation by the enemy. Of the fight that was going forward in the valley of the Selle they could see nothing nor, in the roar of the battle, hear anything either. 26 Aug. 1914.

The Duke of Cornwall's L.I. and the East Surreys were, as a matter of fact, pressing slowly but steadily forward in spite of considerable opposition; and two companies of the former became separated from the rest of the detachment, which was advancing westward, and turned to the south-west upon St. Benin. Some confusion was caused in the advance by the presence of Germans dressed in what appeared to be khaki, which more than once misled the British as to the action they should take in order to rejoin their division. However, D Battery and the southern half-battalion of the Cornwall L.I. succeeded in enfilading the German troops in the valley, and the enemy withdrew to the eastward, to all appearances pretty severely punished. The greater number of the Cornwall L.I. and East Surreys then moved south-west on Escaufourt, though one detachment, while still 500 yards short of St. Benin, turned westward, and made for Reumont, where 5th Divisional Headquarters were established. The bulk of the Cornwall L.I. arrived at Escaufourt between 11 A.M. and noon, and found that they had cut their way through the Germans at the comparatively small cost of two hundred casualties, and this number in the course of the following days was reduced to one-half by the return of missing men. The half-battalion of the East Surreys made its way to Maurois, beyond Reumont and the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Brigades retired with great deliberation due south up the valley towards St. Soupplet. The first turning movement of the Germans on the eastern flank—attempted, it is true, in no great strength—had thus been foiled.

During this period, however, the troubles of the troops immediately to the west of Le Cateau were increasing. About 10 A.M. the Germans brought guns up to the summit of the heights east of the town, and the devoted batteries

and battalions of the British 5th Division on the high ground between the town and the Roman Road, were now enfiladed from both flanks. The 11th Battery man-handled two guns round to the east and replied effectively to the German fire; but the concentration of a superior number of German guns, probably the artillery of the *5th* and *7th Divisions*, upon the exposed batteries of the XV. and XXVIII. Brigades R.F.A. caused considerable losses; salvos of shells crashed down on gun after gun in succession, but the gunners stood to their work, and the supply of ammunition never failed. The Suffolks and Yorkshire Light Infantry, the front line of the 14th and 13th Infantry Brigades, were also assailed by an unceasing storm of shrapnel and high-explosive shell, but vied with the artillery in steadiness. At 9.45 A.M. the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, of the 19th Infantry Brigade, who had been ordered forward from Reumont, arrived on the right rear of the Suffolks; two companies dug themselves such cover as they were able with their "grubbers" on the ridge, while the rest remained in the hollow to the west of them. About 10 A.M. the firing line at last had a target, for German battalions began to advance in thick masses along a front of over two miles from the valley of the Selle to Rambourlieux Farm.[1] The 11th Battery, man-handling a second section round to the right, fired upon them in the valley at pointblank range with great execution. Before long, every officer of this battery had fallen, and so many men that only enough were left to work a single gun. But that single gun never ceased firing; and the other batteries, nearly all of which had suffered heavily, showed the like indomitable spirit. From Reumont also the 108th Heavy Battery burst its sixty-pounder shells among the hostile infantry with beautiful precision, tearing great gaps in their swarming ranks and strewing the ground with killed and wounded.

But losses did not stop the German infantry of 1914. The gaps were instantly filled, and the advance of the enemy in the valley, though retarded, was not brought to a standstill. Parties reached a little copse upon Montay Spur, and strove to enfilade the Suffolks from the north, but they were checked mainly by a machine gun of the York-

[1] This was, no doubt, the attack of the enemy *7th Division*, with the *14th Infantry Brigade* on both sides of the Forest—Le Cateau road and *13th Infantry Brigade* on both sides of the Forest—Montay road (see Lohrisch).

shire Light Infantry posted on the Roman Road. Further to the west, the Germans made less progress. From the region of Rambourlieux Farm, profiting by past experience, they came forward in small bodies, at wide intervals, and taking cover behind the corn-stooks that covered the fields; but, though they attacked again and again, they were driven back by the shells of the artillery. In the zone allotted to the 37th and 52nd Batteries and the XXVIII. Brigade R.F.A. the Germans came on in close formation, and suffered very heavily. The first target of the 122nd Battery was a platoon in line, with the men shoulder to shoulder, which emerged from a fold in the ground. The battery commander gave the order "one round gun fire," and every man of the Germans fell. At every subsequent effort of the enemy in this direction, much the same scene was repeated and each gathering line of Germans was laid low. 26 Aug. 1914.

Nevertheless, though the machine gun of the Yorkshire Light Infantry checked every attempt of the enemy to approach the Suffolks in force, it was possible for small parties of Germans to creep up into a cutting on the Cambrai road on their flank, and to enfilade them both with rifles and machine guns. Every attempt of these parties to build up a firing line in advance of the cutting was, however, foiled by the steady marksmanship of the Suffolks and by the shells of the 52nd Battery. The left company of this battalion had besides a very fair field of fire over the ground to the north-east, and forbade any hostile progress in that quarter. But the German machine guns could be neither discovered nor silenced; and the Suffolks, except on their extreme left, which was protected by an artificial bank, were falling fast under their fire. Colonel James of the Manchesters had already pushed forward one company and a machine gun to the right rear of the Suffolks, prolonging their line to the south; and, shortly after 11 A.M., judging the position to be critical, and being unable to find the brigadier, he ordered two more companies of his battalion to advance and reinforce the Suffolks. At the same time, he called upon the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and 1/Middlesex, of the 19th Infantry Brigade, to support him.

The two companies of the Manchesters accordingly moved forward under a terrible fire of artillery, rifles and machine guns, but, in spite of more than one check, succeeded in reaching the trenches of the Suffolks. The left

company seems to have suffered less than the other, and on reaching the left company of the Suffolks found that it was not needed. The remainder, who bore more to the right, were thrown back more than once; and eventually only a portion reached the right centre of the firing line. Ammunition for the Suffolks' machine guns began to fail at this point; and it was vital to replenish it before the enemy could further develop his attack from the east. Major Doughty, who had succeeded to the command of the battalion upon the fall of Colonel Brett early in the day, with a small party managed to bring up a few bandoliers, but he fell desperately wounded at the moment of his arrival. Meanwhile, two half-companies of the Highlanders from the low ground, facing once again a storm of fire, rushed through the wreck of the 11th Battery into the right section of the trenches of the Suffolks and, though at heavy loss, brought them at least some assistance. It was now noon. Two German heavy guns [1] now reached the summit of the Montay Spur and opened fire at close range. The last gun of the 11th Battery was silenced; and the Suffolks, together with their reinforcement of Highlanders, were in a worse plight than ever. Nevertheless, after nearly six hours of incessant and overwhelming fire, the right of the British line, which rested on Le Cateau, still stood firm. The German infantry was steadily increasing in numbers on their front and, despite all efforts, was drawing steadily nearer. Their right flank was open; they were searched with fire from front and right and left; and strong columns, betokening the approach of the German *III. Corps*, were closing in upon the right flank. It mattered not: they had been ordered to stand. The I. Corps, for whose coming they waited, might be late, as Blücher had been at Waterloo; but, until it should come, there must be no giving way. Nor did they yield the ground until the divisional orders for retirement reached them some hours later.

### *The Right Centre of the Line.*

Map 11. On the left of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, the 2/Scottish Borderers (13th Infantry Brigade) and the Bedfords and Dorsets (15th Infantry Brigade) were for the present hardly engaged. They saw nothing of the

[1] Probably 4·2-inch field howitzers with telescope trails, enabling them to be used for direct fire.

enemy but distant columns advancing upon Inchy from the north-east, which were observed to be caught by shell fire and forced to deploy. With the 9th Infantry Brigade, on the left again, the situation was nearly similar. The German guns[1] opened upon it soon after 6 A.M. before the men had completed the trenches begun overnight, but with so little effect that they were able to continue digging themselves in and, thus sheltered, suffered trifling loss. There was no sign of any infantry attack—no rifle fire, indeed, except that of a few skirmishers with here and there a machine gun—and it was pretty evident that the enemy had no idea for the present of any attack upon this portion of the line. On the other hand, German troops,[2] working up the valley from Béthencourt and from the wood just to the east of it towards Inchy, were heavily shelled by the guns of the 6th Battery and of the XXIII. Brigade R.F.A. Some small parties, nevertheless, contrived to make their way into Beaumont and Inchy, only to be greeted there by the lyddite shells of the 65th Howitzer Battery; and all their efforts to build up a firing line in front of the twin villages were foiled by the deadly marksmanship of the British. 26 Aug. 1914.

Against the line of the 8th Infantry Brigade around Audencourt the German guns came into action rather later than against the 9th Infantry Brigade, but the German infantry showed itself almost immediately afterwards, trickling down in thin lines towards the Cambrai road, with its machine guns clearly visible. Its advance was, however, cautious, for three British platoons which had been pushed out to the north of the Cambrai road were able to rejoin the brigade without being seriously pressed; and it was not until about 9 A.M. that first the 4/Middlesex to the east of Audencourt, and later the machine guns of the Royal Scots, in the country road just to the north of it, opened fire upon parties of Germans who had crossed the Cambrai road. Even then the engagement in this quarter throughout the forenoon was no more than desultory. The headquarters of the brigade and the whole of its transport were in Audencourt itself, and there seemed no immediate menace to their security. Masses of German infantry were indeed assembling upon the Cambrai road under a devastating fire from the British artillery; but the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades had a good field of fire,

[1] Probably of the *IV. Corps* from near Solesmes.
[2] The *4th Cavalry Division* ("Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 63).

and there was little temptation to the enemy to waste strength in attacking them, when immediately to their left lay Caudry, forming a decided salient in the British line.

Upon Caudry the German shells fell very heavily from an early hour; and bullets were whistling down the streets even before the fall of the shells. Up to 6 A.M. and even later the units of the 7th Infantry Brigade were still under the impression that the retreat would be resumed; but the enemy's movements soon banished all idea of this, for about 7 A.M. the German riflemen [1] moved against both flanks of the village with vigour, pouring a very heavy fire in particular upon the Worcesters on the left. So pertinacious was its onset that reinforcements were summoned from the 8th Infantry Brigade; and about 8.30 A.M. two weak companies of the Royal Irish came up and took post in a railway cutting which skirts the eastern flank of the village. Half an hour later, at 9 A.M., the Irish Rifles and the 41st Battery ended their wanderings of the night by rejoining the brigade.[2] The battalion entrenched itself about a thousand yards south of Caudry near Tronquoy, while the guns unlimbered to its right rear. Until noon the 7th Infantry Brigade contained the Germans without difficulty, and they gained little or no ground; it seemed probable that here, as on the rest of the British centre, they were husbanding their strength until their main effort against both flanks of the British should produce its effect.

### *The Left Wing.*

Map 11. On the left wing in the 4th Division no orders had been issued for the retirement to be continued; those sent out on the previous evening to occupy the Haucourt position [3] still held good and were confirmed as soon as General Smith-Dorrien's message reached Divisional Headquarters at 5 A.M. But, as on the right, the general action opened with misfortune for the British. Until 6 A.M., or thereabouts, the rear guard of the 11th Infantry Brigade on the right of the division continued exchanging shots with the enemy to the north of Beauvois, when it gradually withdrew, the 1/Rifle Brigade coming in last of all and

[1] The *9th Cavalry Division* and three *Jäger* battalions ("Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 59).

[2] See p. 128.

[3] See p. 129.

taking position in the hollow road which runs southward from Beauvois to Ligny. A platoon of *Jäger*, which was imprudent enough to advance in pursuit through Fontaine au Pire, was annihilated by the accurate fire of a detachment of the 1/Hampshire; and after that the enemy made no further attempt to follow up the 11th Infantry Brigade.[1] Meanwhile, the 12th Infantry Brigade was resting on its position on the left of the 11th covering Longsart and Esnes. French cavalry patrols, as has been told, had been understood to report the front to be clear; and the 4th Division had no divisional cavalry or cyclists to verify the French observations. The King's Own were formed up preparatory to entrenching. Suddenly, shortly after 6 A.M., two French troopers riding towards Cattenières were seen to turn and gallop at the top of their speed to the south-west; and immediately afterwards a devastating fire of machine guns swept down upon the King's Own. Caught in close formation, the hapless battalion was terribly punished. The men were at once ordered to lie down and the front rank of each platoon—all that could safely use their rifles—opened fire at about eight hundred yards range upon the German machine guns with immediate effect. Five minutes later, however, two or three German batteries came into the open between Wambaix and Cattenières Railway Station, unlimbered, and speedily picking up the range, poured upon the unlucky King's Own a storm of shells, which thinned their already depleted ranks still further. Two companies of the Warwickshire from the reserve, by direction of a staff officer, swarmed up the hill to extricate them, but were swept back upon reaching the crest with very heavy loss. For some twenty minutes this storm of shells burst over the King's Own, after which the fire of guns and machine guns slackened, and the survivors of the battalion moved away to their right into the shelter of a country lane, running east and west, from which they opened fire with such effect that the machine guns were smothered. A few men from the rear of the mass, who had sought shelter in the ravine, rallied and rejoined their comrades; and the King's Own, though reduced by some four hundred casualties, recovered themselves with commendable quickness. 26 Aug. 1914.

The Germans then turned their fire upon portions of the right wing of the Lancashire Fusiliers, to the west of

[1] This enemy was the *2nd Cavalry Division*, with two *Jäger* battalions ("Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 55).

the King's Own; and soon German mounted men came out into the open, only to give place to a considerable body of infantry [1] in the space between Wambaix and Cattenières. The Lancashire Fusiliers brought their machine guns into action; and, though one of these became jammed at once, the other did good execution. But the enemy, having far greater numbers of machine guns—it was estimated that they had twenty-three in this quarter of the field alone at this time [2]—and being consequently able to use them with greater freedom, now crept away to the left flank of the Lancashire Fusiliers, and enfiladed them with deadly effect. Two companies of Inniskilling Fusiliers had already come up from Longsart to prolong the line of the Lancashire Fusiliers, one upon the eastern and the other upon the western flank; but the latter was at once engaged with German dismounted cavalry. There were signs also of the development of a hostile attack upon the front and western flank of Esnes, where the two remaining companies of the Inniskilling Fusiliers were already disposed for defence. Against them, across a cornfield that had recently been cut, advanced the *7th Jäger*, in open order, apparently without any suspicion that a foe was near. As soon as the Inniskillings opened fire the Germans took cover behind the corn-stooks. But these availed them little, and after a time they ran back, leaving forty-seven dead in front of one of the companies when its commander in the lull that ensued went out to count them. Thus for at least an hour and a half the 12th Infantry Brigade held its own against the *2nd Cavalry Division* and two *Jäger* battalions, backed by artillery and numerous machine guns.

At length about 8.45 A.M. the German progress towards Wambaix, round the left flank of the advanced line, had gone so far that a retirement seemed to Brigadier-General H. M. Wilson imperative. The King's Own on the right were the first to be sent to the south side of the Warnelle Ravine; and, to cover this movement, two companies of the Warwickshire (10th Infantry Brigade) were ordered to deliver a counter-attack from Haucourt upon the ridge to north of Longsart. The 1/Hampshire, of the 11th Infantry Brigade, pushed forward two platoons to protect the

[1] Dismounted men of the *2nd Cavalry Division* and *Jäger* ("Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 56).

[2] Twenty-one, according to "Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 56:—the guns of the *4th M.G. Abteilung* and two *Jäger* battalions.

Warwickshire's right flank, seeing which a German battery moved up and unlimbered close to the railway station just south of Cattenières. The Hampshire men, after taking the range, opened rapid fire at a thousand and fifty yards, and within a minute the battery turned and galloped away to seek shelter. This little incident, though a triumph for British musketry, could not of course affect the main issue. The Warwickshire again reached the crest of the ridge, and so gained some little respite for the King's Own, but they suffered severely from the intense fire of artillery and machine guns and were forced to fall back. The Lancashire Fusiliers were the last to go—not without difficulty, for the Germans were within three hundred yards of them; they rallied on the ridge to the south. The company of the Essex on their left had retired a little earlier; but that of the Inniskillings withdrew with the Lancashire Fusiliers, with the exception of the left platoon, which remained where it had fought, amid a circle of German dead, with not a single man unwounded. The withdrawal of the 12th Infantry Brigade across the valley to the line Ligny—Esnes was now practically accomplished. 26 Aug. 1914.

Meanwhile, the artillery of the 4th Division had come into action. At 5.30 A.M., immediately on the issue of the divisional operation orders sent out on receipt of General Smith-Dorrien's message, the C.R.A., Brigadier-General Milne, ordered his brigades to reconnoitre positions: the XXXVII. (Howitzer) and XXXII. Brigades R.F.A. to the east of the Iris stream, and the XIV. and XXIX. to the west of it; and the two last at once to take up positions of readiness south-east of Esnes. Shortly afterwards, the Divisional Artillery came into action: the XXXII. and XXIX. Brigades being detailed to co-operate with the 11th Infantry Brigade, and the XIV. with the 12th Infantry Brigade.

In the XXXII., the 27th Battery unlimbered in the open to the west of Ligny, the 134th in a covered position immediately to the south-west of the village, with the 135th, also under cover, to the left rear of the 27th. The brigade was brought into action as rapidly as possible, as the 11th Infantry Brigade was asking for artillery support to divert from it some of the German gun fire to which it was being subjected.

The XXIX. Brigade took up its position south-east of Haucourt. Of the XIV., the 68th Battery came into action at once just south-west of Haucourt, the 39th three-quarters

of a mile in rear, with the 88th in the valley-head to the east of St. Aubert Farm. The XXXVII. (Howitzer) unlimbered in the Iris valley, but did not open fire from this position. The heavy battery, as already noted, was not present.

The fire of the XIV. Brigade gained time for the 12th Infantry Brigade to rally; and now the enemy came on, against the Lancashire Fusiliers, just as the British would have desired,—in masses, firing from the hip.[1] A burst of rapid fire from a hastily formed line now speedily brought the German advance to a standstill, and the Lancashire Fusiliers took advantage of the lull to re-form on a better position a short distance in rear. The German artillery now redoubled its fire; but between 9.30 and 10 A.M. the worst of the surprise attack was over, and Brigadier-General H. M. Wilson was able to reconstitute his line along a front from Ligny through Haucourt to Esnes, already occupied by part of the 10th Infantry Brigade. Brigadier-General Haldane, warned to secure the left flank of the division, withdrew the Seaforth Highlanders to a ridge south and somewhat east of Esnes; and on this ridge the new position of the two brigades assumed the shape almost of a semicircle, with its convex side to the enemy. The units were very much mixed, and it is impossible to say precisely where some of them were placed.

By 11 A.M. the firing in this quarter of the field had died down. The German attack, delivered by a mixed force of cavalry, *Jäger*, and possibly infantry, with a very powerful backing of artillery, had been repulsed. The 12th Infantry Brigade had, indeed, been forced back to the south side of the Warnelle Ravine; and had suffered heavy casualties, chiefly owing to the mishap to the King's Own. The cavalry and the cyclists of the 4th Division, had they been available, would undoubtedly have prevented this surprise. Even as things were, the division had succeeded in holding its own. Moreover, if the Germans hoped to pin it to its ground, they had failed; for there was nothing now to prevent the 4th Division from continuing its retirement if it so desired.

During this period the 11th Infantry Brigade became isolated to a certain extent, owing to the retirement of the 12th Infantry Brigade on its left and, on its right, by the distance which separated it from the 7th Infantry

[1] These troops would appear to have been dismounted cavalry.

Brigade; but it held on with the greatest tenacity. Its position, it may be recalled, was on the Caudry plateau to the north of the Warnelle Ravine, astride the "Quarry" knoll and extending thence south-west across the railway to the edge of the plateau, its general front being towards the north-west. Before part of this front, notably on the northern slope of the "Quarry" knoll, there was a natural glacis, but further to the west the field of fire was bad. The enemy, of course, avoided the glacis, and preferred to work round both flanks of the brigade and attack along the line of the railway from the west and from the southern margin of Fontaine au Pire from the north-east. But though the Germans brought up battery after battery, until the line of their guns extended from Wambaix to the north of Fontaine,[1] and swept the plateau with them and with machine guns, the bombardment was not followed by the advance of infantry in large bodies. After a time the East Lancashire were compelled to retire from the northern slope of the "Quarry" to a sunken road upon the southern slope, and there they remained. The Rifle Brigade and two companies of the Somerset Light Infantry, on the right of the East Lancashire, also held their ground, though heavily shelled. They were rewarded occasionally by the sight of German infantry striving to advance over the stubble, and seized every opportunity of cutting them down by rapid fire. 26 Aug. 1914.

More than once small parties of the 11th Infantry Brigade were forced out of the more exposed positions by the rain of shrapnel; but they always reoccupied them, or were replaced by supports from the Warnelle Ravine. Once the Hampshire, on the left of the line, essayed a counter-attack, but it proved too costly. The Germans at this point were too wise to quit their shelter; they had an overwhelming force of artillery; they had brought forward their machine guns with their wonted skill; and they might reasonably reckon that the 11th Infantry Brigade would soon retire and abandon the position without bitter fighting, or, better still, cling to it too long, and be surrounded. Here, therefore, as on the remainder of the left wing, there was a deadlock.

So far General Smith-Dorrien had everywhere held his ground successfully for some six hours; and, except

[1] The artillery of the *IV. Reserve Corps* was sent up ahead of its infantry and no doubt had come into action to assist the *Cavalry Corps* (Wirth).

immediately to the west of Le Cateau, his line was not only unbroken but unshaken. Even there the enemy had not immediately pressed home the advantages which he had gained; but the situation was rapidly growing more serious. To that critical point we must now return.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU, 26TH AUGUST (*continued*)

#### NOON TILL 5 P.M.

(See Sketch 3 ; Maps 3, 10 & 11)

### *The Right of the Line.*

SHORTLY after noon the situation of the Suffolks and of the batteries supporting them, on the right of the line, became serious under the German enfilade fire. The 108th Heavy Battery, in action well behind the right flank, had silenced one troublesome group of guns near Croix ; but, despite this good piece of shooting, the hostile artillery still far outmatched the British.[1] Reserves there were none, except for the four battalions of the 19th Infantry Brigade ; and of these the Cameronians and Royal Welch Fusiliers, in view of the enemy's movement on Ligny, had at 10 A.M. been moved away westwards to Montigny, behind the left flank of the II. Corps ; a part of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had already been thrown into the fight ;[2] and only the remainder of this battalion, together with the 1/Middlesex, were available on the right. By the brigadier's orders, two half-companies of the Argylls, with the battalion machine guns, were now sent up into the lane that ran over the ridge to the right rear of the Suffolks ; and the 1/Middlesex moved forward into position upon the right of the Highlanders. The only reassuring feature in the situation of the 5th Division was that the Germans were not pushing their way up the valley of the Selle past the right flank of the 14th Infantry Brigade with the rapidity and vigour that might have

Sketch 3. Maps 10 & 11.

[1] Apparently the greater part of the artillery of the German *5th*, *6th* and *7th Divisions* was in action against the 5th Division.

[2] See p. 150.

been expected. Whether the German *III. Corps* had been slow in following its advanced troops, or, as it came upon the field, had been diverted from Le Cateau westward, in support of the frontal attack on the 14th and 13th Infantry Brigades, was unknown.[1] In any case, the detachment of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, seeing no German troops in the valley, turned its machine guns at long range on to the ridge east of Le Cateau. This drew the fire of the German artillery, which put both the machine guns out of action. But, at the moment, the danger lay not in the east but in the north. About noon, General Smith-Dorrien visited the 5th Divisional Headquarters again, and discussed with Sir Charles Fergusson the question of holding on or retiring. As the Germans were so near, it was thought that a counter-attack would be necessary to disengage, and the decision to retire was, temporarily, postponed.

Shortly before 1 P.M., Sir Charles Fergusson from his lookout in Reumont village could see that the right of his division was shaken and might shortly give way, and he reported in that sense to Corps Headquarters. A little later he added that a German division[2] was working round his right towards Bazuel. Finally at 1.20 P.M. he suggested that unless material assistance could be sent to him he had better begin retiring. It seems to have been about this time that, during a lull in the German fire, the teams of the 11th Battery came up to the guns, and got five of them away, the team of the sixth being shot down. The teams of the 80th and 37th Batteries also came forward, and brought away five of the guns and four of the howitzers; another howitzer as will be seen was recovered later on. But these three batteries were saved only at the cost of the teams of the 52nd, of which the guns had consequently to be abandoned. The gunners of this battery were ordered to retire, but a few remained and managed to keep one gun in action. Somewhat later, the teams of the 122nd Battery galloped up through the line of the West Kents, in brigade reserve, who stood up and cheered them loudly as they dashed between their trenches and onward down the slope towards their guns. As they came within view of the enemy, they were struck by a hurricane of shrapnel and of bullets from the machine guns in the Cambrai road; but still they went

[1] For what happened to the German *III. Corps*, see p. 185.

[2] The *5th Division* of the *III. Corps*.

on. The officer in charge of the teams was killed, one team shot down in a heap before the position was reached, but two guns of the 122nd Battery were carried out without mishap. A third was limbered up, but the horses went down instantly. It was an extraordinary sight: a short wild scene of galloping and falling horses, and then four guns standing derelict, a few limbers lying about, one on the skyline with its pole vertical, and dead men and dead horses everywhere. It was then decided to abandon the remainder, as also the guns of the 121st and 123rd Batteries, which were in an even more exposed position, the breech-blocks being first removed and the sights smashed. Altogether, twenty-five field guns and the howitzer were lost in this part of the field; but, considering that the batteries were practically in the firing line, it is astonishing that any were rescued; and the feat redounds to the eternal honour of the officers and men of the 5th Divisional Artillery. 26 Aug. 1914.

It was now about 2 P.M. At 1.40 P.M., in response to the 1.20 P.M. message, General Smith-Dorrien had placed his two remaining battalions, the Cameronians and the Royal Welch Fusiliers, at Sir Charles Fergusson's disposal, ordering them to move from Montigny to Bertry, and asked him to hold his ground at any rate a little longer so as to allow the preliminary movements of the retirement to take effect, but to begin the withdrawal of the 5th Division as soon as he should think fit; after which the 3rd and 4th Divisions were to follow in succession. Roads had previously been allotted for the retirement to the north-west of St. Quentin, when it should take place, as follows:—

To the 5th Division and 19th Infantry Brigade, two roads: Map 3.
(1) via Bertry—Maretz, and thence the Roman Road to Vermand;
(2) via Reumont—Maurois—Busigny—Bohain—Brancourt—Joncourt—Bellenglise.

To the 3rd Division, that via Montigny—Clary—Elincourt—Malincourt (east of the Church)—Beaurevoir—Gouy—Bony—Hargicourt—Jeancourt.

To the 4th Division, that via Selvigny—Malincourt (west of the Church)—Aubencheul—Ronssoy—Templeux—Roisel.

To the Cavalry, any roads west of the 4th Division.

The pressure upon the British line immediately west of Le Cateau now became severe, and it seemed clear that the Germans were preparing for a great effort. Before Map 11.

the teams of the 122nd Battery advanced, three platoons of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had twice made gallant attempts to reach the trenches of the Suffolks, but had been beaten back with severe loss by artillery and machine-gun fire. They rallied under the protection of the 59th Field Company R.E., which gave up its trenches to them and lay down in the open. So intense, in fact, was the machine-gun fire upon the whole ridge to the rear of the Suffolks that the Highlanders had to abandon the line of the road which they had taken up, and move further down the slope towards the valley of the Selle. Meanwhile, the German battalions were steadily gaining ground; in fact, as the last gun team of the 5th Divisional Artillery was driving off, as described two paragraphs above, they were only four hundred yards from it, and were only kept back for a time by a party of the Manchesters, which, with the machine-gun detachment, offered so stout a resistance as to gain a few minutes' respite. During this brief interval, Captain Reynolds of the 37th Battery, having obtained permission to call for volunteers, came galloping down with teams to rescue the two howitzers which had been left on the ground. The German infantry was then within two hundred yards, yet by the gallantry and devotion of this little party both howitzers were limbered up; and though one team was shot down before it could move, the other galloped off with its howitzer and brought it safely away.

This episode, which gained the Victoria Cross for Captain Reynolds and for Drivers Luke and Drain, was the last gleam of light upon this gloomy corner of the field.[1] Between 2.30 and 2.45 P.M. the end came. The Germans had by this time accumulated an overwhelming force in the shelter of the Cambrai road, and they now fell upon the Suffolks from the front, right flank and right rear. The turning movement, however, did not at once make itself felt, and the Suffolks and Argylls opened rapid fire to their front with terrific effect, two officers of the Highlanders, in particular, bringing down man after man and counting their scores aloud as if at a competition. The Germans kept sounding the British "Cease fire" and gesticulating to persuade the men to surrender, but in vain. At length a rush of the enemy from the rear bore down all resistance; and the Suffolks and their Highland comrades were overwhelmed. They had for

[1] Captain Reynolds was killed by gas near Ypres, 1916.

nine hours been under an incessant bombardment which had pitted the whole of the ground with craters, and they had fought to the very last, covering themselves with undying glory. 26 Aug. 1914.

Meanwhile orders had been issued about 2 P.M.[1] by Sir Charles Fergusson for the retirement of the 5th Division to begin, but these do not appear to have reached any battalion much before 3 P.M. It was comparatively easy to communicate with brigades, but nearly impossible to get messages to the firing line, as the fighting there was literally hand-to-hand, and the ground in rear was swept by shell fire. Further, the 14th Infantry Brigade was handicapped by the loss of its Signal Section, which had been practically destroyed in the early morning fighting in Le Cateau. As a result no orders at all reached Lieut.-Colonel Bond and the companies of the Yorkshire Light Infantry in the firing line. The survivors of the Manchesters (14th) and Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (19th) drifted back towards Reumont; and meanwhile the right of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, which faced eastwards, was heavily engaged with German infantry advancing over the ridge which the Suffolks had held. First two battalions in dense masses swept over the crest and down the beetroot-field on its western slopes. The K.O.Y.L.I.—five platoons with two machine guns—allowed them to move well down the slope and then opened rapid fire, which drove the enemy back with heavy loss to the reverse side of the ridge. Meanwhile, the Duke of Wellington's and West Kents (13th Infantry Brigade) had begun to retire from the left rear of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, as did also the East Surreys, conforming to the movement of the West Kents; whilst the Scottish Borderers (13th) on the other flank of the brigade were also beginning to fall back. When, therefore, shortly after their first advance, the Germans reappeared on the crest of the ridge, they could outflank the right of the Yorkshire Light Infantry. This they proceeded to do, progressing slowly and warily, after the lesson that they had received, and throwing out troops wide to the south-east so as completely to envelop the K.O.Y.L.I.'s right rear. The five platoons and the machine guns once again found a good target at five hundred yards' range and took full advantage of it; but the Germans now pressed home their

[1] No records or messages of this period are available as the 5th Divisional Headquarters' wagon was hit and blown up in Reumont.

attack on the main front of the battalion from the Cambrai road, and on its left flank from the ground vacated by the Scottish Borderers. Although the left, by sheer marksmanship, was able to prevent the enemy from planting machine guns on the last-named point, it could not prevent its occupation by increasing numbers of the enemy who at once opened a destructive enfilade fire. A desperate effort was made to reinforce this flank, but nearly every man sent forward was shot down; and the enemy now set himself systematically to roll up the attenuated line of the Yorkshiremen from left to right. In spite of the gallant efforts of Major Yate,[1] who commanded the firing line, the end came soon afterwards; the company with him had lost over sixty men killed outright and many wounded, and the other companies had suffered equally; and when about 3.30 P.M. the final rush of the enemy took place, the survivors were overpowered and made prisoners. That night the 2/K.O.Y.L.I. mustered only 8 officers and 320 rank and file, but it had held up the Germans at the only point where they penetrated into the British position, and thus gave the rest of the 5th Division a clear start of the enemy in their retirement.

Whilst the advance of the enemy through the gap immediately to the west of Le Cateau had been thus delayed by a single battalion, the progress of his outflanking movement to the east of the town was also checked. Two half-companies of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, it will be remembered, had moved down the western slope of the valley of the Selle; here the 59th Field Company Royal Engineers had joined them; and in the course of time, half the 1/Middlesex, with two companies of the 1/Scots Fusiliers (from the reserve of the 9th Infantry Brigade) prolonged the line to the right. Towards 3 P.M. German troops[2] were seen advancing westwards over the spur on the eastern side of the valley; whereupon the Highlanders and the machine guns of the Middlesex opened fire at twelve hundred yards' range, and effectually turned them back. Thus the Germans were held for a time both to the east and west of Le Cateau; and General Smith-Dorrien's dispositions, now in progress, to cover the retreat on this side had

[1] Major Yate was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. He was found with his skull smashed in by persons unknown during an attempt to escape from Germany.

[2] *III. Corps.*

ample time to take effect. The long valley that runs up from Le Cateau southwards to Honnechy had been since 9 A.M. under the observation of the 1st Cavalry Brigade and E Battery, posted between Escaufourt and Honnechy, these troops having retired to that position, where they found L Battery in action, at the close of their first engagement with the enemy about Bazuel. At 1.15 P.M. the Cornwall Light Infantry, and the two companies of the East Surreys that were with them, were ordered from the reserve of the 5th Division[1] to Honnechy; about 2 P.M. the 2/Royal Welch Fusiliers and 1/Scottish Rifles of the 19th Infantry Brigade, Sir Horace's only corps reserve, now at the disposal of the 5th Division, were directed to march from Bertry, and to post themselves on the left of the Duke of Cornwall's at Maurois; and the 1/Norfolk were sent back from the "Tree" on the Sunken Road to Reumont. Lastly, a section of the 108th Heavy Battery was ordered to take up a position near Honnechy; and, though one gun was unfortunately upset in a ditch and had to be abandoned, the other safely reached the place assigned to it. By 3 P.M., or very little later, the whole of these troops were in position behind the right flank; and it only remained to be seen how vigorously the enemy would follow up his success. At 3.47 P.M. the II. Corps reported to G.H.Q. by a telegram, received at 3.50 P.M., that the retirement had begun. 26 Aug. 1914.

Towards 3.30 P.M. the Germans[2] again showed themselves on the eastern side of the Selle, this time in extended order, so that the rifles and machine guns of the party of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had not the same chance against them as before. But, as they advanced, they were met by the shells of E and L Batteries, and, after working their way south for a time, took shelter under cover of the railway embankment, and there came to a temporary standstill. The 1/Middlesex on the Highlanders' right now withdrew up the valley of the Selle towards Reumont; and the latter, being warned that the Germans were crossing the Roman Road in their left rear, fell back to the spur which runs south-west from Reumont, where they found a mixed body of Manchesters and other units deployed, and took up position alongside them. The Germans had by this time—about 4.30 P.M.—brought up guns to engage the British batteries near Escaufourt and were again advancing up the valley of the Selle; but their

[1] See p. 147 *et seq.* [2] *III. Corps.*

losses were heavy and their progress slow. An aeroplane detected the position of E and L Batteries, but the German fire does not appear to have done any great damage. There was no sign of German cavalry hurrying forward in masses to the pursuit; and there seemed to be a good prospect that darkness would fall before the enemy could close with the rear guards retiring from the valley of the Selle.[1]

Immediately to the west of Le Cateau in the 13th Infantry Brigade area, the enemy equally failed to press his advantage; the shells of the 61st Howitzer Battery and 108th Heavy Battery constantly broke up the German infantry when it tried to reassemble and re-form. The 2/Duke of Wellington's was certainly heavily shelled as it retired, but suffered little harm, though the battalion became widely scattered. The West Kents fell back slowly and methodically, and their rear guard saw nothing to shoot at except a German company which showed itself for a few minutes passing eastward through the abandoned guns of the XV. Brigade R.F.A. more than a thousand yards away. Between 4.30 and 5 P.M. this rear guard retired in extended order without molestation even by artillery. The Scottish Borderers withdrew in the same way, though the order to retire unfortunately did not reach the greater part of one company, which was surrounded and captured. Near the "Tree" on the Sunken Road at least one company halted for the best part of an hour, and fired with great effect upon German infantry nine hundred yards to its right. Between 4.15 and 5 P.M. the battalion fell back by successive companies to Troisvilles, and then turned to cover the retreat of the 15th Infantry Brigade which was falling back in perfect order. Thus on the right of the line, the most critical point of all, things had not gone altogether ill in the first and most difficult stage of the retreat.

### Noon to 5 P.M.: The Right Centre of the Line

Map 11. Until a little past noon the Bedfords and Dorsets in the firing line of the 15th Infantry Brigade, on the left of the 5th Division, saw little or nothing of the enemy, except at a distance; and even then they could perceive only small parties on the Cambrai road (which at this

[1] No orders for pursuit were issued by von Kluck until 8.13 P.M., and these directed the line Esnes—Caudry—Reumont to be crossed at 4 A.M. next day.

point offered no shelter to the enemy) attempting to bring machine guns into position. These were promptly engaged and smothered by the fire of the Dorsets' machine guns before they could come into action. Later on the German infantry showed itself in front in greater force, but was so hotly received by the Bedfords and Dorsets, as well as by the batteries of the XXVII. Brigade R.F.A. that it would not venture upon a definite attack. Soon after 3 P.M. the order to retire was received by the 15th Infantry Brigade, and it was calmly and systematically obeyed. The 119th Battery was withdrawn first, and moved back to the spur just south of the "Tree" on the Sunken Road. About 3.30 P.M. the Bedfords and Dorsets fell back slowly in succession covered by the machine guns of the latter, and, together with the 121st Battery, faced about again at the south-eastern angle of Troisvilles. No Germans had yet crossed the Cambrai road on their front, being checked by the rifle fire, at long range, of the right company of the Fifth Fusiliers (9th Infantry Brigade); but the enemy's artillery now concentrated a very heavy fire upon Troisvilles from the north and north-east, and, gradually finding the range, compelled this company, as well as the Scottish Borderers on its right, to retire once more. The 121st Battery was only limbered up with difficulty, but the Dorsets, well covered by their machine guns, got back to the southern end of Troisvilles with little loss. A German aeroplane now appeared over their heads, dropping smoke signals, and the German gunners guided by these put down a barrage of shrapnel on every road and track leading to the south. The Scottish Borderers, who had taken the road towards Reumont, were diverted from it to the open country further west. The Dorsets and the Bedfords broke into small parties and, passing through the barrage with little or no damage, headed south across country towards Maurois. Bedfords, Dorsets, Cheshire (15th Infantry Brigade reserve) and Scottish Borderers all entered the Roman Road near Reumont or Maurois without the slightest pressure of German cavalry or infantry upon their rear. Only on their right—towards Le Cateau —had the enemy been seen in any force; and his advance there had been delayed as has already been described. 26 Aug 1914.

The withdrawal of the 5th Division from a broad and scattered front on to a single road at right angles to it naturally brought as a consequence a thorough mix-up of all units—except in the case of the 15th Infantry

Brigade, which entered it as a formed body. This state of affairs the Staff, as will be later narrated, took steps to remedy as soon as possible; but the enemy was too close for any immediate attempt at re-forming to be made. There was, to quote one eye-witness, "confusion, but no disorganization; disorder, but no panic"; while another has exactly caught the scene by saying that it reminded him of a crowd leaving a race meeting and making its way earnestly towards a railway station.

### Noon to 5 p.m.: The 3rd Division

Map 11. On the left of the 15th Infantry Brigade in the 3rd Division sector, the 9th was perfectly secure. The enemy had established himself on the southern edge of Inchy, but had been unable to advance a yard further; and, though Brigadier-General Shaw's battalions had had little opportunity of using their rifles, the XXIII. Brigade R.F.A. had inflicted very severe loss on the German infantry. Soon after 3 p.m. the brigadier observed that the troops on his right were retreating; and though it was plain that the Germans were not following them in any strength, he was relieved when orders reached him, at 3.30 p.m., to conform with the movement. Pushing up the Royal Fusiliers from the reserve to the north-western edge of Troisvilles, he brought away nearly all his wounded, after which he withdrew in succession the Fifth Fusiliers and the Lincolnshire with very trifling loss. The German skirmishers lining the southern edge of Inchy tried hard to hinder the movement, but were silenced by the advanced sections of the 107th and 108th Batteries. Although the Fifth Fusiliers, before they could reach the shelter of a hollow near Le Fayt, had to cross a thousand yards of open ground, the German artillery scarcely fired a round at them. As the last party of the Lincolnshire came abreast of the advanced section of the 108th Battery, the officer in command, having fired off his last round of ammunition, disabled and abandoned his guns. They and the other advanced section had done great work, but at the cost of four eighteen-pounders. The retreat was then continued methodically, without pressure from the enemy, and the battalions re-formed as soon as they reached sheltered ground. The XXIII. Brigade R.F.A. was collected at Bertry; and the 9th Infantry Brigade took up a position on the ridge between Bertry and Montigny to cover the

retreat of the rest of the 3rd Division; its casualties hardly amounted to one hundred and eighty. 26 Aug. 1914.

### Noon to 5 p.m.: The 8th Infantry Brigade and the 4th Division

The course of events west of the 9th Infantry Brigade is less easy to describe. From noon onwards there was a lull in the German fire; and advantage was taken of this to reinforce the troops at Caudry with half a company of the Irish Rifles. Some of the 12th Infantry Brigade likewise seized the opportunity to recross to the north side of the Warnelle Ravine in order to bring in their wounded, but they were driven back by a steady fire from the enemy before they could collect many of them. Then about 1.40 p.m. the German guns opened fire once more with increased violence and in much greater numbers,[1] concentrating in the first instance chiefly on Caudry, while simultaneously German infantry advanced against the junction of the Royal Scots and Gordon Highlanders immediately to the north of Audencourt. They failed however to gain any ground, being met by an accurate fire on their front and effectively enfiladed, at a range of six hundred yards, by the left company of the Gordons. At Caudry itself the enemy was more successful, for by 2 p.m. the troops of the 7th Infantry Brigade were driven from the village by the bombardment, and German infantry was able to enter and occupy it. About the same time masses of German infantry[2] developed a strong attack from the north-west against the half-battalion of the Inniskilling Fusiliers which covered the western flank at Esnes. It was met by rapid rifle and machine-gun fire, supported shortly after by artillery. The answering German fire was wholly ineffective, and the Inniskillings were able to check this attack completely. Nevertheless, the situation was not reassuring, for it was clear that fresh German infantry, the herald of another corps, had come up, and that, if it failed to break in on the north side of Esnes, it would work round to the left flank and rear. Map 11.

Meanwhile, between 2.30 and 3 p.m. the 3/Worcester-

[1] Some guns of the German *4th Reserve Corps* had no doubt arrived (see footnote 2, p. 174).

[2] This was, no doubt, the advanced guard of the *7th Reserve Division*, which got up at 2 p.m. (see footnote 1, p. 174).

shire (7th Infantry Brigade) counter-attacked at Caudry, reoccupied the southern portion of the village and pushed advanced posts to the north and north-east. But the northern part of the village was not recovered, and the Germans had already made the 11th Infantry Brigade sensible of their presence on its right flank. Brigadier-General Hunter-Weston, naturally assuming that Caudry had been finally lost, decided to withdraw the 11th Infantry Brigade across the Warnelle Ravine to a position before Ligny. The guns of the 135th Battery were brought forward and entrenched in and round Ligny for close defence; and then, the 1/Rifle Brigade being left at the "Quarry" as rear guard, the remaining battalions of the brigade were shortly after 3 P.M. drawn off into the low ground of the Ravine under a perfect tempest of shrapnel. As they came into sight of the Germans again on the slope just below Ligny, the enemy redoubled his fire, inflicting considerable loss, and when at last the rear guard withdrew from the "Quarry," the German infantrymen[1] sprang up from their concealed positions and rushed forward in pursuit. Their ranks were instantly torn and mangled by the British guns; but they speedily rallied and continued the advance regardless of losses, and, before the 11th Infantry Brigade could be completely re-formed, they swarmed forward to the attack of Ligny. Met by shrapnel and rapid fire, they turned, unable to persist against the hail of bullets. But being reinforced, they advanced again, only to suffer still more heavily, for the British were now better prepared to receive them. They fell back again, too severely punished to find heart for a third attempt; and the 4th Division was left in undisputed possession of Ligny. These actions hardly came to a complete end before 4 P.M.

It was amid such turmoil on the extreme left of the line that shortly after 3 P.M. General Hubert Hamilton rode down to Colonel W. D. Bird, who was with his battalion of Irish Rifles at Troncquoy, and directed him to take command of the 7th Infantry Brigade, since Brigadier-General McCracken had been disabled by a shell, and to withdraw the troops from Caudry under cover of the Irish Rifles and two field batteries. Colonel Bird made his dispositions accordingly; and by 4.30 P.M. his brigade was practically clear of the village. At that hour

[1] The *3rd, 9th* and *10th Jäger* and *19th Cavalry Brigade* according to "Deutsche Kavallerie," pp. 59, 60.

the troops in Audencourt, on the east of Caudry, suddenly fell back, both artillery and infantry. The 8th Infantry Brigade had received its instructions to retire about 3.30 P.M., but there was difficulty and delay in communicating them to the various units, and it is certain that some of them received none at all. The 4/Middlesex and the Royal Scots, with the exception of a detached party of the latter on the immediate right of the Gordons, were withdrawn without much difficulty. The party above named, together with the bulk of the Gordons, and two companies of the Royal Irish, having no orders to move, remained in their positions. Three platoons of the Gordons, however, heard of the order to retire, and managed to get away, as also did the reserve companies of the Royal Irish. These last were obliged to fight hard to extricate themselves and the batteries of the XL. Brigade R.F.A.;[1] but three guns of the 6th Battery were lost, the teams being shot down by a lucky salvo whilst in the act of withdrawing. Two platoons of the Royal Irish also were cut off from their main body, but contrived to make good their retreat independently. Meanwhile since 2.30 P.M. Audencourt had been furiously bombarded, and the vehicles and horses of the 8th Brigade Headquarters, and the whole of the brigade machine guns and transport were lost. The German infantry, however, made no attempt to advance. The 41st Battery, working with Colonel Bird, opened fire on the crest east of Caudry, as soon as our troops were clear of it; but, so far as can be gathered, there was at the time not a single German upon this ground. Half an hour later, however, at 5 P.M. the German infantrymen did swarm forward, toiling painfully up a gentle slope through beetroots that reached to their knees. Whether they expected opposition or not is hard to say, but they were met by the rapid fire of the Gordon Highlanders and Royal Scots, who shot them down at a range of from four to six hundred yards with the greatest coolness. One subaltern of the Royal Scots reckoned that he hit thirty to forty of them himself. The Germans were unable to gain an inch of ground; for the best part of an hour they swayed backwards and forwards in front of these few isolated groups, probably exaggerating their strength both in men and machine guns, but completely at a loss how to clear them out of the way.

26 Aug. 1914.

The rest of the 8th Infantry Brigade, having re-formed

[1] Their adversaries were two brigades of the *9th Cavalry Division* and the whole of the *4th* ("Deutsche Kavallerie," pp. 61, 62).

in dead ground, took the road to Montigny, and Colonel Bird, after waiting for fully twenty minutes without seeing a sign either of retreating British or advancing Germans, led back the 7th Infantry Brigade soon after 5 P.M. by the same road, without the slightest interference on the part of the enemy.

### Summary of the Situation at 5 P.M.

Map 3. Thus by 5 P.M., roughly speaking, the whole of the II. Corps had begun its retreat and its rear guards were all in position, and the moment had come for the 4th Division, which was on its left, to move; and there was no time to lose. For, although the right of the division was for the moment secure after the double repulse of the German attack upon Ligny, masses of the *IV. Reserve Corps* [1] were now arriving from the direction of Cattenières—Wambaix.

Map 11. The appearance of Sordet's Cavalry in the left rear of the 4th Division now provided a most opportune diversion. General Smith-Dorrien had naturally counted on this co-operation; and General Sordet, having visited Sir John French at 9 A.M., was fully conversant with the situation. His corps on the night of the 24th/25th had bivouacked near Avesnes—Dompierre, and on the 25th moved more than thirty miles across the line of march of the B.E.F. in order to reach its left flank. It arrived late at night in the neighbourhood of Walincourt, about ten miles west by south of Le Cateau, men and horses dog-tired and soaked with rain. Of its three divisions, the 5th halted for the night in and about Esnes, the 1st at Lesdain and the 3rd at Le Bosquet (3 miles south-west of Esnes). The corps moved out to the south of Cambrai on the morning of the 26th in observation of the ground on the left rear of the British and of the southern exits from Cambrai. Towards 4 P.M., when the moment for effective action seemed to have come, the corps found itself faced by German infantry [2] from the direction of Wambaix, and its batteries opened fire. These guns were heard by General Smith-Dorrien about 4.30 P.M. as he was moving south

[1] The *7th Reserve Division*, see Hauptmann Wirth's "Von der Saale zur Aisne." He states that the advanced guard of the division reached the Cambrai highroad north of Cattenières about 2 P.M., and that the guns had been sent on ahead and were already in action. He adds that the German "cavalry had been thrown on the defensive and several regiments were cowering under cover behind the houses."

[2] *22nd Division* of the *IV. Reserve Corps*, probably.

from Bertry to his new headquarters at St. Quentin, and, not knowing whether the sound came from French or German artillery, he had a bad moment; but, galloping up to the top of some high ground near Maretz, he was able to satisfy himself that it could be only from French 75's.[1] Further, beyond the left of the French cavalry, it was known that troops of General d'Amade were in and about Cambrai.[2] All, therefore, seemed well, and the British left flank secure. 26 Aug. 1914.

[1] The following further details are available as regards General Sordet's Cavalry Corps: The 1st Cavalry Division billeted and bivouacked for the night of the 25th/26th around Esnes to Le Bosquet, with the 5th on its right and the 3rd on its left. The corps moved out early after a night spent in great discomfort in wet clothes. During the day the divisions manœuvred and reconnoitred; the 1st moving back to Villers Guislain, and then forward about 2 P.M. to within a short distance of Cambrai, where it engaged hostile infantry (*II. Corps*) coming out of the town, until 6.30 P.M., and then it retired with the 5th Cavalry Division (whose other movements are not known) via Gouzeaucourt. (From Extracts of War Diary of the 11th Dragoon Brigade and Major Létard's "Trois Mois au Premier Corps de Cavalerie.") Map 3.

[2] See Note at end of Chapter IX.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE CLOSE OF THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU, AND THE CONTINUATION OF THE RETREAT

### 5 P.M. TO NIGHTFALL

**(See Sketch 3 ; Maps 3, 4, 9, 11 & 13)**

### *The Right of the Line.*

Sketch 3. Map 11. THE party of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (19th Infantry Brigade),[1] together with the 59th Field Co. R.E. and a collection of scattered men, last mentioned as being on the right, was deployed upon the spur that runs south-eastward from Reumont. The Royal Welch Fusiliers, Cameronians (both of the 19th Infantry Brigade, from Montigny), Norfolks (15th Infantry Brigade) and one sixty-pounder of the 108th Heavy Battery, were in rear of it, between Maurois and Honnechy. The Bays (1st Cavalry Brigade), with E and L Batteries, were at Escaufourt, E Battery being in action against the guns which were endeavouring to cover the advance of the German infantry of the *III. Corps* up the valley of the Selle. This infantry now crossed the Roman Road on the Highlanders' left front, advancing in open order with company columns in rear, and was engaged by the party at a thousand yards' range. The enemy made no great progress, for the party had plenty of ammunition, and there was no immediate reason why it should fall back. After a time, however—about 5.30 P.M.—Lieut.-Colonel Ward of the 1/Middlesex (19th Infantry Brigade) led his own battalion (which had been halted east of Reumont in the valley of the Selle), and the various detachments on the spur near by, towards Reumont and the Roman Road, detailing the Highlanders to act as his rear guard. The whole, therefore, moved off in succession, skirting Reumont where German shells were

[1] See p. 167.

now falling thickly; the rear guard had no sooner quitted its position than the German artillery searched the deserted spur with a hail of shrapnel. A company and a half of the Norfolks, sheltered in a quarry to the south-west of Reumont, were now left as the troops nearest to the enemy; and about this time the cavalry and horse artillery began to fall back slowly from Escaufourt towards Busigny (6 miles S.S.W. of Le Cateau), leaving the passage up the valley towards Honnechy open to the enemy. The Norfolks opened fire at a range of about 1,800 yards on the German infantry in extended order to the north-east, and in due time retired to the edge of Honnechy, passing as they went through a company of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, which had been deployed to take over rear guard from them. 26 Aug 1914.

From this point the Norfolk companies had a clearer view of German columns, both of infantry and artillery, advancing on the road up the valley from Le Cateau, preceded by lines of skirmishers. They engaged them at long range, and the solitary sixty-pounder of the 108th Heavy Battery, having no shrapnel left, opened fire with lyddite. Major G. H. Sanders commanding the 122nd Field Battery, having after a time followed his two remaining guns to Reumont, collected two ammunition wagons, and unlimbered south of the village and opened fire on the enemy columns.

The Germans had by this time advanced up the valley to the point where the road from Reumont to St. Souplet intersects that from Le Cateau to Busigny; but there, to the great surprise of the Norfolks, they stopped and showed themselves no more.[1]

It was now fully 6 P.M. A drizzling rain had just set in, and the light was beginning to fail early. The enemy's pursuit seemed to die away. His guns did indeed shell the position of the Royal Welch Fusiliers; but, instead of heavy masses of infantry, small parties of cavalry now hovered about their front, feeling their way forward and provoking constant little bursts of fire from the British rear guards, which in the meanwhile continued to fall back in succession as the Roman Road gradually became clear for them. The congestion on that road was considerable, for it was packed with infantry, guns, transport

[1] Von Kluck does not explain this, saying "the latter [*III.*] *Corps*, "ordered to march on Maretz, did not get further than Honnechy on the "26th, so that the attempted enveloping movement failed."

and ambulances of the 5th Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade in no fixed order, just as each unit had happened
Map. 3. to strike the highway. There was some confusion, but the men marched on steadily and in silence. A few units—the 1/Middlesex and a number of scattered men under Lieut.-Colonel Moulton-Barrett of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders—made their way by two parallel tracks, east of the Roman Road, to Busigny, where the 3rd Cavalry Brigade was in position to cover them, and thence turned westward into the Roman Road. At 7 P.M. or a little later, German cavalry patrols ran into parties of the 11th and 19th Hussars north of Busigny; and men of the former regiment were shelled while crossing the railway near Busigny station. The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, the two companies of the East Surrey which were with them, the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the Cameronians, moved back steadily from position to position and arrived at Maretz, almost without firing a shot; the Cameronians waited at Maretz until 9.30 P.M. without seeing a sign of the enemy. Hostile pursuit, worthy of the name, had ceased after 6 P.M.; in fact contact was practically lost as darkness fell. The whole of the 5th Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade were now in retreat along the Roman Road; their right flank, which had been exposed all day, was no longer threatened.

### 5 P.M. TO NIGHTFALL: THE 3RD DIVISION

Map 11. The narrative left the 3rd Division in the following situation: two companies of the Royal Irish, some of the Royal Scots and the greater part of the Gordon Highlanders were still occupying their original ground in front of Audencourt, having received no orders to retire, and were successfully arresting any German advance; the 9th Infantry Brigade was in a covering position between Bertry and Montigny (2 miles south of Caudry); and the bulk of the 7th and 8th were in orderly retreat on Montigny.
Map 3. These two latter formations passed through the 9th Infantry Brigade and marched away to Clary, making south-westwards for Beaurevoir (13 miles south-west of Le Cateau) by way of Elincourt and Malincourt. Not a German came forward, not even a cavalry patrol, to follow them; and not a shell was fired at the 9th Infantry Brigade, which at 6 P.M. became the rear guard to the 3rd Division. Evidently the enemy was wholly occupied with

the detachments—not a thousand strong, all told—which had not retired from the original fighting line. At 6 P.M., after an hour spent in vain and costly attempts to break through the Gordons, his fire died down, but began again twenty minutes later, as he tried to work round the right of the Royal Scots. This was however foiled by the oblique fire of the right company of the Gordons, across the front of the Royal Scots; and at 6.45 P.M. the Germans once again concentrated a heavy bombardment upon Audencourt. As darkness came down the firing died away into occasional fitful bursts, but at 8.30 P.M. the German guns once more heaped shells upon the ruins of Audencourt, not a little to the wonder of the 3rd Division, who, from the heights south of Clary some six miles away, watched the projectiles bursting over its deserted position with grim satisfaction. Thus the British centre had been withdrawn, from under the very eyes of the Germans, with very little difficulty and no serious loss. 26 Aug. 1914.

### 5 P.M. TO NIGHTFALL: THE 4TH DIVISION

About 5 P.M. the infantry brigadiers of the 4th Division received their orders to retreat, the 10th Infantry Brigade being detailed as rear guard. At that hour the German infantry to the immediate front of the line was still quiescent from the effects of its repulse before Ligny; but the volume of hostile artillery fire had continued steadily to increase, and the turning movement round the western flank of Esnes had been renewed and pressed until the Inniskillings had been forced back to the western fringe of the village. The units of the 10th and 12th Infantry Brigades were so mixed that the transmission of orders was exceedingly difficult; but the sound of General Sordet's guns about Crêvecœur (2½ miles west of Esnes) gave assurance that the division could retire without fear of serious attack on its western flank. The Seaforth Highlanders, already in position behind this flank, between Guillémin and St. Aubert Farm, had been joined in the course of the afternoon by some platoons of the Irish Fusiliers, and these, with the 4th Cavalry Brigade further east near Selvigny, were thus ready to cover the first stage of the retreat. Artillery support was also close at hand, for, meantime, Brigadier-General Milne, having had early warning of the intention to break off the action, had made general arrangements for the retirement Map 11.

of the artillery to a succession of covering positions. After the heavy attack on Haucourt about 2 P.M. the XXIX. Brigade R.F.A. had retired to a position in the Iris valley between Caullery and Selvigny (2 miles S.S.W. of Ligny), and the XIV. Brigade had moved back about the same time to another one immediately north of Selvigny. About 4 P.M. the 35th (Howitzer) Battery had been ordered back behind the railway, so as to be prepared to cover the retirement of the remainder of its brigade, which was ready to do the same for the XXXII. Brigade, still south-west of Ligny. At 4.30 P.M. orders were given for the Brigade Ammunition Columns to get clear and join the route of the main column at Walincourt (3 miles S.S.W. of Ligny). About 5 P.M. the 31st and 55th (Howitzer) Batteries were withdrawn to the south of Selvigny, where the 35th Battery joined them.

It is difficult to ascertain which of the infantry were the first to be withdrawn; but it seems that part of the 12th Infantry Brigade, the Essex and the two forward companies of the Inniskillings, moved off soon after 5 P.M., halting and facing about on the road between Selvigny and Guillémin. The Lancashire Fusiliers, half of the Dublin Fusiliers (10th Infantry Brigade), and part of the King's Own appear to have started rather later, though half of the King's Own, receiving no warning to retire, remained in position at Haucourt. The rest of the Inniskillings slipped away in small parties from Esnes, just as the enemy penetrated to the western houses of the village, and retreated upon Walincourt in good order. The enemy smothered the road with shrapnel, but the British columns moved on either side of it and escaped all damage.

The 11th Infantry Brigade and the remainder of the 12th, much scattered, held their positions until 6 P.M. or even later. The 135th Battery (XXXII. Brigade R.F.A.), which was in close support of the infantry near Ligny, was so exposed that its withdrawal seemed impossible, and orders were actually issued that the guns should be abandoned, but the battery commander, Major Liveing,[1] decided to try and save his guns and, withdrawing them and their wagons by hand, brought all of them (except one wagon) safely away. To the west of Ligny the position of the 27th Battery (XXXII. Brigade R.F.A.) was even worse; nevertheless, the gunners, taking advantage of every lull, succeeded in running back four guns and

[1] He was awarded the D.S.O.

limbers to the sunken road in rear, when increase in the German artillery fire compelled them to abandon the remaining two. The battery then formed up and awaited its opportunity; it eventually made a dash to the south-west, and, though it was pursued by German shells, got its four guns safely away.[1] 26 Aug. 1914.

Of the 11th Infantry Brigade, Lieut.-Colonel Swayne of the Somerset Light Infantry brought away with him what survived of two companies; the rest of the battalion under Major Prowse having become separated from him remained fighting at Ligny until a late hour. The East Lancashire withdrew in three distinct bodies, two of which united at Clary. The main body of the 1/Rifle Brigade made its way to Selvigny and took up a covering position there, whilst another party, with scattered men of other regiments, came later to the same village with the brigadier. Last of all the Hampshire retired, about 7 P.M., and overtook the rest of the brigade on its way to Serain (4 miles south of Selvigny), where it passed the night. Of the 10th Infantry Brigade, only the Seaforth Highlanders and the greater part of the Irish Fusiliers were under their brigadier's hand. Half of the Warwickshire and a good number of the Dublin Fusiliers were still in Haucourt, and the remainder were dispersed in various directions, some as escort to guns, others in small isolated bodies.

As with the rest of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's force, the enemy not only did not pursue the 4th Division, but did very little even to embarrass the retreat. The 1/Rifle Brigade, the rear guard of the 11th Infantry Brigade, and the mixed party with it, finding the roads blocked in every direction, bivouacked at Selvigny, within two miles of the battlefield, and the Seaforths almost level with them on the east, at Hurtevent Farm. The remainder were directed on through Walincourt, by way of Malincourt—where a divisional column of march was made up with the artillery—and Aubencheul, to Vendhuille (2 miles north-west of Le Catelet). Von Kluck's shells, as we have seen, followed the British as long as they were within sight and range, and caused a few casualties, though not many; he also bombarded the evacuated positions with great fury until dark; but his cavalry and infantry made no attempt to press on. In fact, the whole of Smith-Dorrien's troops had done what was thought to Map 3.

[1] The battery commander, Major H. E. Vallentin, received the D.S.O., and two sergeants and five gunners, the D.C.M.

be impossible. With both flanks more or less in the air, they had turned upon an enemy of at least twice their strength; had struck him hard, and had withdrawn, except on the right front of the 5th Division, practically without interference, with neither flank enveloped, having suffered losses certainly severe, but, considering the circumstances, by no means extravagant.[1] The men looked upon themselves as victors, some indeed doubted whether they had been in a serious action; yet they had inflicted upon the enemy casualties which are believed to have been out of all proportion to their own; and they had completely foiled the plan of the German commander.

## German Accounts of Le Cateau

Maps 3, 9, & 11.

Very little has been published in Germany about Le Cateau, and there is no official account of the battle, as there is of Mons and Ypres. The fighting on the 26th August was at first almost concealed by being included in the so-called "battle of St. Quentin." There is no doubt that the enemy suffered very heavy losses, and for that reason has said little about it.

In the official list of battles issued at the end of 1919, it is called "the battle of Solesmes—Le Cateau (25th-27th August 1914)," and the troops present are given as *III. Corps* (*5th* and *6th Divisions*), *IV. Corps* (*7th* and *8th Divisions*), *IV. Reserve Corps* (*7th Reserve* and *22nd Reserve Divisions*) and *II. Cavalry Corps* (*2nd*, *4th* and *9th Cavalry Divisions*), whilst the *3rd Division* of the *II. Corps* is shown as engaged on the 26th at "Cambrai."

The official bulletin, issued by the Supreme Command on the 28th August, runs as follows:

"Defeat of the English at St. Quentin. The English "Army,[2] to which three French Territorial divisions[3] had

[1] The total losses, after the stragglers had come in, were 7,812 men and 38 guns, including one 60-pdr. abandoned (see note, p. 224). A large proportion of these losses fell on the 4th Division, which had no Field Ambulances to remove the wounded.

General von Zwehl stated in the *Militär Wochenblatt* of the 30th September 1919 that the prisoners taken, which include wounded, were 2,600; and this is confirmed by von Kluck. The surprise of the King's Own in the early morning and the capture of the 1/Gordon Highlanders, about to be described, added a considerable portion to the total casualties, and might have been avoided.

[2] Only three out of five divisions were present at Le Cateau.

[3] Only one Territorial division—the 84th—was present. The 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions were west of Cambrai, but not engaged (see p. 186).

" attached themselves, has been completely defeated north " of St. Quentin, and is in full retreat through St. Quentin.[1] " Several thousand prisoners, seven field batteries and a " heavy battery fell into our hands." [2]

The troops were told that 12,000 prisoners had been taken.[3]

As already noticed in the text,[4] von Kluck's operation orders for the 26th, issued at Haussy, three miles north of Solesmes, at 10.50 P.M. on the 25th, merely give instructions for a long march in pursuit, mainly in a direction in which there was not much to pursue. His summary of them runs :

" The *First Army*, from parts of which severe marches are " demanded, will continue the pursuit of the beaten enemy.

" The *II. Corps* [commencing on the west] will march via " Cambrai on Bapaume, west of the road Valenciennes—Ven- " degies—Villers en Cauchies—Cattenières, till it is abreast of " Graincourt [5 miles S.W. of Cambrai].

" The *IV. Reserve Corps*, starting early, via Vendegies— " Villers en Cauchies to Cattenières.

" The *IV. Corps* from Solesmes and Landrecies, by two " routes : via Caudry, and via Montay—Caullery—Walincourt, " to Vendhuille ; the road Landrecies—Le Cateau is allotted " to the *III. Corps*.

" The *III. Corps* by the Landrecies—Le Cateau road to " Maretz.

" Orders will be issued at Solesmes at 11 A.M.

" The *IX. Corps* will cover the flank march of the Army " against the west and south-west fronts of Maubeuge, and will " send any troops not required to follow the *III. Corps* via " Berlaimont—Maroilles to Landrecies."

Although von Kluck has read Sir John French's despatch, from which he quotes at length, he is evidently even now labouring under considerable misapprehension as to the dispositions of the B.E.F. and its movements. It is best to quote his narrative :

" In the early morning Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps*, via " Wambaix—Beauvois—Quiévy, attacked the enemy, who " was withdrawing in a westerly (*sic*) direction, drove him " partly back towards the south, and held him fast until " the heads of the army corps came up." This account hardly corresponds with the long pause in the fighting and

[1] Only the 5th Division, part of the Cavalry, and some stragglers came through St. Quentin.

[2] See footnote 1, p. 182, for the correct figures.

[3] Bloem, p. 183.

[4] See p. 129.

Captain Wirth's story of finding the regiments of the Cavalry Corps cowering behind the shelter of houses.[1]

"The *IV. Corps* about 8 A.M. attacked strong British "forces at Caudry—Troisvilles—Reumont, and encoun- "tered stout resistance from the enemy, who was well- "established in his position. The *IV. Reserve Corps* was to "envelop the northern [*sic*] and the *III. Corps* the southern "[*sic*] flank of the position. The former, however, struck "against the French at Cattenières; the *III. Corps*, "moving on Maretz, did not get further than Honnechy "on the 26th. By evening the *IV. Reserve Corps* succeeded "in driving its opponents back in a southerly direction "whilst the *IV. Corps* overthrew the right wing of the "British. The *II. Corps* defeated stronger French forces "at Cambrai."[2]

Apparently von Kluck really thought that the B.E.F. was facing east, and that if the *IV. Reserve Corps* drove it southwards, *i.e.*, off its line of retreat to Calais—Boulogne, it would endeavour to get away to the west. This is confirmed by the fact that when the *IV. Reserve Corps* relieved Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps*, the latter moved west of Cambrai, and on the 27th marched down the Cambrai —Bapaume road to intercept any movement of the B.E.F. westwards. The *II. Corps* also pushed on west-south-west of Cambrai on the 26th, and its *4th Division* reached Hermies, half-way to Bapaume, where it blocked any escape to the west.

The narrative of the battle ends with the statement, which shows that von Kluck thought the British I. Corps and the 6th Division, still in England, were present. "The "whole British Expeditionary Corps, six divisions, a "cavalry division and several French Territorial divisions "opposed the *First Army*. . . . If the English stand on "the 27th, the double envelopment may yet bring a great "success."

Von Kluck reported to the Supreme Command that he had won a victory, and not over three divisions but nine, and thereby, it is claimed by German writers, helped to mislead von Moltke as to the real situation.[3]

Relying on the retreat of the British westward being intercepted by Marwitz's *Cavalry* and the *II. Corps*,

[1] See footnote 1, p. 174.

[2] This is hardly the case. See the action of the French 84th Territorial Division at Cambrai, p. 186.

[3] Tappen, p. 21. Kuhl, "Marne," p. 82.

which was to march at 1 A.M., he gave the remainder of his force a night's rest. His operation orders, issued at 8.13 P.M., directed the *III.*, *IV.*, and *IV. Reserve Corps* "to cross the line roughly Esnes—Caudry—Reumont at "4 A.M." This was the British battle front of the previous evening, and as the action was broken off by Sir H. Smith-Dorrien at 3.30 P.M. and all his three divisions were on the move by 5 P.M., they had nearly twelve hours' start of the enemy. Thus it was, the German cavalry having been given a wrong direction, that there was no pursuit.

As there is no coherent account of the battle from the German side, the information available with regard to each of the German corps is given for reference in a note at the end of the chapter.[1] The action in reality took a totally different form to what von Kluck supposed. In general, the *IV. Corps* made the principal attack, with the *II. Cavalry Corps* on its right, frontally, not against a flank; part of the *III. Corps* came up on the left of the *IV.*, and in attempting envelopment was apparently badly mauled; at any rate, it effected nothing. In the afternoon the *IV. Reserve Corps* came up and relieved the *II. Cavalry Corps*. On its right (west) the *II. Corps* attacked the French 84th Territorial Division in Cambrai.

Apparently the German troops thought that the battle would be continued on the 27th, for Hauptmann Wirth, of the *7th Reserve* Divisional Staff, expresses surprise that the advance of the *IV. Reserve Corps* met with no opposition on that day: "the British had left the battlefield during "the night, and had gone in such haste that we did not "succeed in catching them up again."

## General d'Amade's Force on the British Left on the 26th August

The part played on the left of the British during the battle of Le Cateau by three of General d'Amade's divisions has been generally overlooked in English accounts. The full story of their operations has yet to be written, but sufficient is known to make it certain that they accounted for the absence of the German *II. Corps*. This corps had been ordered, on the evening of the 24th, to make a wide sweep to envelop the British left[2] and, on the 25th, as we have seen,[3] swung westwards through Denain, and

Maps 3 & 10.

[1] See pp. 200-202.

[2] Kluck, p. 53.

[3] See pp. 130-31.

arrived at night with the heads of its columns about nine miles north of Cambrai and little more than that distance from the British left; it was, in fact, eight miles nearer to it than the *IV. Reserve Corps* at Valenciennes, which attacked the British 4th Division about 2 P.M. on the 26th.

The French 84th Territorial Division, which had been on the left of the British at Mons, retreated with them, and on the night of the 25th/26th, its rear guards were opposing the passage of the Sensée Canal by the western columns of the German *II. Corps*, at Bassin Rond and Pallencourt, just south of Bouchain and some six miles north of Cambrai.

During the 26th August the division was gradually pushed back to Cambrai, and then westwards through the town. To quote the words of the only available account: [1]

"The defence of Cambrai was organized along its north-
"western front from the Pont d'Aire to Tilloy (both 1½
"miles north of Cambrai). . . . The attack developed on
"the morning of the 26th at Escadœuvres (1½ miles north-
"east of Cambrai on the Solesmes road). The outpost
"battalion of the 27th Territorial Regiment fell back to
"the 'Pont Rouge' and the railway; the 25th Territorial
"Regiment took up a position by the Schelde Canal bridge.
"The final stand was made in the suburb Saint Olle (on
"the western side of Cambrai), which the staff of the
"84th Territorial Division left at 12.30 P.M. Captain
"Saglier, of the 27th, defended the barricade near the
"church till about 2.15 P.M."

The information with regard to the French 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions is less explicit.[2] These divisions were railed to the front from Paris, and, on the 26th August, detrained at Arras, twenty miles from Cambrai. General d'Amade, whose headquarters were in Arras, having received reports that columns of German troops were marching southwards through Orchies towards Bouchain, ordered the two Reserve divisions south-east towards Cambrai, part of them by train. They got as near as Marquion,[3] six miles from Cambrai, on the afternoon of the 26th, when they received a special order from General Joffre ordering them to Combles and Péronne with a view

[1] An article in "La Renaissance" of 25th November 1916, quoted by Colonel Bujac in his book "La Belgique envahie" (Fournier, Paris 1916).
[2] See Hanotaux, vol. 7, p. 298; and Palat, vol. 5, p. 134.
[3] Ouy-Venazobres, "Journal d'un officier de cavalerie," p. 23.

to the formation of the Sixth Army. They therefore turned westwards again, followed by the 84th Territorial Division, which was later in action at Marquion with the *14th Pomeranian Regiment* (*4th Division* of *II. Corps*). 26 Aug. 1914.

Von Kluck's account claims[1] that the *II. Corps* drove back strong French hostile forces on the 26th. But for the presence of the three French Reserve and Territorial formations there seems no doubt that the *II. Corps* would have taken part at Le Cateau with both its divisions.

### The Troops left on the Battlefield. 3rd and 4th Divisions

There can be little doubt but that the comparative ease with which the first stages of the retreat were accomplished was due to the tenacity of the units which, having received no order to retire, clung with all their strength to the positions they had been ordered to hold.[2] The story of the Suffolks and the K.O.Y.L.I. has already been related; it now remains to tell that of the isolated detachments of the 3rd and 4th Divisions. Some time after dark, firing having ceased, it became known to Lieut.-Colonel Neish of the Gordons that an order had been shouted by two staff officers to different parts of the line for the 8th Infantry Brigade to retire, and that this order had reached every one except the bulk of his own regiment, the company of the Royal Scots which lay on its right and two companies of the Royal Irish on its left. At 7.45 P.M. Brevet-Colonel William Gordon, V.C., of the Gordon Highlanders, being the senior officer in army rank, assumed command of the whole of these troops; and at 9.20 P.M. Colonel Neish sent an officer and two men to Troisvilles to obtain orders, if possible, from the headquarters of the 3rd Division. This officer not returning within the allotted time of two hours—he had fallen, as a matter of fact, into the hands of the enemy at Troisvilles—Colonel Gordon assembled his force towards Caudry at midnight, and at 12.30 A.M. marched off, quite undisturbed, through Audencourt (2 miles N.N.W. of Bertry). All was quiet in the village, and at 1.30 A.M. the head of the column reached Montigny (1½ miles west of Bertry). Here a light was seen in a cottage, and the occupants—a man and a woman, who were presumed to be French—reported that early in the morning the British troops had moved Maps 2 & 11.

[1] Kluck, p. 59.

[2] See footnote, p. 190.

on Bertry and Maurois. The man was ordered to guide the party through Montigny on to the road to Bertry, which he did; and at 2 A.M. the head of the column reached the cross roads to the south-west of Bertry. Here three shots were fired, and after a few minutes' delay, during which the advanced guard endeavoured to ascertain the nationality of the post, there was a heavy outbreak of rifle fire. The men were extended, and answered it. Orders were then given for the column to move back along the road to Montigny. But in the darkness the road south-westward to Clary was taken instead, and the column came upon a field gun which was trained to fire down the highway. This gun was rushed and taken before it could be discharged, and a mounted German officer near it was pulled off his horse, but the rear of the column was now met by rifle fire from the south and south-west. Once again the men were extended and replied, but the fire from the front and rear showed them pretty clearly that they were trapped. The head of the column now made an effort to force its way into Bertry, and stormed a house on the outskirts of the village, in which were a number of German officers. The enemy, however, was by this time thoroughly alarmed. Firing began on all sides, and after fighting against hopeless odds for the best part of an hour longer, Colonel Gordon's party was overpowered. Its captors were the *66th* and *72nd Infantry Regiments* (*IV. Corps*) which had engaged the Suffolks and Yorkshire Light Infantry near Le Cateau. Of the Gordon Highlanders about five hundred were taken, but a few escaped, and a handful of them actually made their way through the German lines to Antwerp, whence they were sent back to England. The fortune of war was hard upon the 1/Gordons. For the time, they practically ceased to exist as a battalion, but by their gallant resistance to all German attacks between 5 P.M. and dark, they had rendered incalculable service to the 3rd Division and to the Army at large.

Further to the west, isolated parties of many battalions were left behind by the 4th Division about Haucourt and Ligny. Two companies of the Dublin Fusiliers under Major Shewan, and two of the King's Own under Major Parker, holding fast to their trenches north and east of Haucourt, were attacked soon after nightfall, but succeeded in beating the enemy off; and a party of the Dublin Fusiliers, attracted by the sound of the firing,

moved up in time to shoot down a number of the retreating Germans. Major Shewan, and Major Poole of the Warwickshire, who had also been left behind on the east of Haucourt with three to four hundred men of his regiment, then consulted together as to what should be done, since the enemy had apparently moved round both of their flanks. Major Poole, being familiar with the ground, undertook to lead the party southward across country, and at 11 P.M. the march began. About the same time Major Parker and his party of the King's Own started southward independently, and succeeded in making good their retreat. Major Poole, steering for Selvigny, struck the village of Caullery. Here he was joined at dawn of the 27th by another platoon of the Dublin Fusiliers under Lieutenant Massy-Westropp, who had retired at dusk from his trenches in the road between Ligny and Haucourt and finding his retreat threatened by a party of Germans in a farm, had promptly attacked them, driven them away and gone on his way unmolested. These, together with his own party and some of the Irish Fusiliers who were with them, Major Poole later led on in the track of the 4th Division. The Dublin Fusiliers, however, lost touch of him in the darkness, and drifted into Ligny at 2 A.M. on the 27th, where they made a short halt to find food. The men dropped down on the road, and instantly fell asleep. After a time, the march was resumed southward upon Clary, but near the entrance to the village they were fired on from the east and, signalling to ascertain whether the aggressors were friend or foe (for in the dim light there was abundant room for error), were told to join them as quickly as possible. The column accordingly advanced, and was at once swept by machine-gun fire from front and flank. The men were deployed, and then ordered to retire by small groups mutually supporting each other. Eventually, the Dublin Fusiliers reached Ligny with about two hundred men, comprising soldiers from nearly every battalion of the 3rd, 4th and 5th Divisions—and even two men of the 1st Division—who had drifted together upon the nucleus under Major Shewan. First they struck out south-east, but finding Germans on every side, turned north-west, and after many wanderings and more than one sharp engagement, finally—seventy-eight officers and men—came through the German lines into Boulogne. The remainder of Major Shewan's party seems to have been killed or taken to a man.

26 Aug. 1914.

On the whole, therefore, it appears that of three detachments which may have numbered in all two thousand men, about one half escaped and rejoined the Army sooner or later. These details may be considered trivial, but they are a testimony to the courage and resource of the officers and men of the old army. Moreover, these detachments had done far better work than they imagined. Though a mere handful scattered along some eight thousand yards of front, they had prevented the enemy for several hours from advancing along the whole of that line. The perpetual bombardment of vacated positions, and in particular that of Audencourt which was repeated an hour after dark, is plain evidence that the Germans were exceedingly suspicious of what might be before them. Beyond question, they had suffered very heavily—as indeed was admitted by German officers to some of their British prisoners—and from one cause and another they were disinclined to take risks. That the isolation of these British detachments was undesigned in no way detracts from the merit of their achievement.[1]

## The Retreat of the II. Corps and 4th Division

Sketch 3. Maps 3 & 13.

While this handful of men was thus hampering the German advance, the main body of General Smith-Dorrien's force was in full retreat. The 5th Divisional Train had started down the Roman Road very early in the day, and two staff officers had accompanied it to keep it moving all night, for there was fear of being overtaken by German cavalry. The 3rd Divisional Train had followed it, cutting in on the Roman Road from the north. Thus one serious encumbrance was removed, but the highway was, nevertheless, choked for miles with an interminable column of transport, with the inevitable consequence of long blocks and frequent short checks. The bulk of the 5th Division and of the 19th Infantry Brigade reached Estrées (15 miles from Le Cateau) between 9 P.M. and midnight, wet, weary, hungry and longing for sleep, and were directed on

[1] Hauptmann Heubner, in his book "Unter Emmich vor Lüttich. Unter Kluck vor Paris," p. 87, confirms the view stated of the effect of the parties left behind. His battalion of the *20th Infantry Regiment, 6th Division, III. Corps*, came on to the field late. He says, "in front of "us there still swarmed a number of scattered English troops, who were "easily able to hide in the large woods of the district, and again and again "forced us to waste time in deployments, as we could not tell what their "strength might be."

to the cross roads, two miles beyond. There the sorting of the troops was taken in hand, a simple process on paper, but difficult enough in practice on a dark and dismal night: staff officers stood at the cross roads, shouting continuously, "transport and mounted troops straight on, "3rd Division infantry to right, 5th Division infantry to "left." Then, when the men turned as directed, they were sorted by other officers according to brigades and battalions. By 2 A.M. on the 27th sorting was completed, and orders were issued for a start at 4 A.M., at which time all units of the 5th Division and the detachments from other formations marched off in good order; some units, of course, were very weak in numbers, as many men had not come in. The transport and mounted troops were sorted out south of St. Quentin, and there, well after sunrise next morning, a rearrangement of the column of the 5th Division was also made; but this was a matter of reorganizing units, not individual soldiers as had been the case near Estrées. 26 Aug. 1914.

About midnight, the 3rd Division, having marched by Elincourt and Malincourt, came into Beaurevoir, north of the 5th Division. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade with the Bays (1st Cavalry Brigade) and 4th Dragoon Guards (2nd Cavalry Brigade), seeing the crowd on the Roman Road, retired east of Estrées to Brancourt, Monbrehain and Ramicourt. The 11th Hussars (1st Cavalry Brigade) came very late into Estrées. Half of the 9th Lancers (2nd Cavalry Brigade) withdrew a little to the south of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade to Fresnoy, the remainder having marched with the headquarters of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade right across the rear of the Army from Bohain, through Beaurevoir to Marquaix (11 miles north-west of St. Quentin). Of the 4th Division, the 10th and 12th Infantry Brigades, with the divisional artillery, retreated, 2½ miles west of the 3rd Division, by Malincourt and Villers Outréaux to Le Catelet and Vendhuille, which were reached between 11 P.M. and midnight. The 11th Infantry Brigade, finding its way blocked by the 3rd Division at Elincourt, remained there for the night.

Everywhere, when the order to halt was given, the men dropped down on the road, and were asleep almost before they reached the ground. The only precautions possible at the late hour were to push small piquets out a few hundred yards on each side of the road. Officers of the cavalry and artillery, themselves half dead with

fatigue, had to rouse their men from a semi-comatose state to water and feed the horses, and to rouse them once more to take the nose-bags off, taking care lest they should fall asleep in the very act. And all this had to be done in inky darkness under drizzling rain. After three or four hours' halt, the order was given to resume the march. The officers roused the sergeants, and the men were hunted out, hustled on to their feet, hardly conscious of what they were doing, and by some means or other formed into a column. Then the column got under way, drivers and troopers sleeping in their saddles, infantry staggering half-asleep as they marched, every man stiff with cold and weak with hunger, but, under the miraculous power of discipline, plodding on.

Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien on arrival at St. Quentin on the evening of the 26th found that G.H.Q. had left for Noyon. After sending off a report of the situation in writing, he proceeded there himself by motor car, to give personally to the Commander-in-Chief an account of the action and its successful breaking off. He arrived shortly after midnight and was informed that the orders, issued by G.H.Q. in the afternoon of the 26th, for the retirement to the St. Quentin (Crozat) Canal — Somme line (La Fère — Ham) still held good. Earlier in the day, before Sir John French had quitted St. Quentin, General Joffre and General Lanrezac had visited him for a conference. Sir John pointed out the isolated position of the British Army, as he conceived it, and the French Commander-in-Chief had confirmed the "directive" already sent to British G.H.Q. In this he had stated his intention of withdrawing to the Laon—La Fère—St. Quentin position, and subsequently retaking the offensive, as soon as a new Army, the Sixth, could be formed on the left of the British. His main interest was that, in spite of the heavy losses they had suffered, the British should not fall out of the line. The Field-Marshal agreed to make his retirement as deliberately as possible.

Thus posted in the general situation, Sir H. Smith-Dorrien returned to his Headquarters at St. Quentin. Under his instructions, the 5th Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade were intercepted at Bellenglise and turned south-eastward upon St. Quentin, where supplies awaited them, with directions to march thence upon Ollezy (4 miles east of Ham). The 3rd Division was to continue its march from Bellicourt and Hargicourt

upon Vermand, heading for Ham. Unfortunately its supply column had missed it and it was without rations from the 25th until the afternoon of the 27th. The 4th Division was to proceed via Roisel, Hancourt, Monchy Lagache to Voyennes (4 miles west of Ham), picking up supplies *en route*.[1] 27 Aug. 1914.

### Continuation of the Retreat on the 27th and 28th August

Very soon after daylight on the 27th August, troops began to pour into St. Quentin. The 1st Cavalry Brigade and most of the 2nd were fed and sent a few miles south to Grand Seraucourt, where they arrived, men and horses completely exhausted. The duty of forming a covering screen to the north of the town was therefore assigned to the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, which, together with the Composite Regiment of Household Cavalry, had reached a position at Homblières just to the east of St. Quentin at 4 A.M. Sketch 3. Maps 3, 4 & 13.

At 5 A.M. the 14th Infantry Brigade trudged into the town, received its rations and re-formed its battalions. Trains had already been ordered on the railway, as well as carts and wagons on the roads, for the conveyance of men who could march no further. The remainder of the 5th Division came in later, when the sun of a scorching day was already high in the heavens. Stragglers and parties from the 3rd and 4th Divisions who had drifted eastward—no doubt because the retirement had been commenced on the right—, contributed to an appearance of confusion which was completely absent on the routes of those divisions themselves and of the battalions of the 5th Division, which marched into the town as properly formed bodies. After a halt of an hour or two for rest and food, the men recovered in an astonishing fashion; and when they resumed their march, they were no longer silent and dogged, but cheerfully whistling and singing. The 5th Division then pursued its way, after a halt for the re-arrangement of the column, without any interference from the enemy, and before dark was in position south of the Somme

[1] An extract from the war diary of a unit of the French 1st Cavalry Division of this date deserves quotation:

"We crossed the route of an English battalion retiring after having "suffered very heavy losses. It moved in touching order: at the head, "imperturbable, a party of wounded. I ordered a salute to be given to "these brave men."

about Ollezy, with its ranks sadly thinned, but ready again to meet the enemy.

The 3rd Cavalry Brigade, acting as rear guard, was equally unmolested. It was joined at 10 A.M. by that part of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, which had marched westward across the rear of the army on the 26th and retraced its steps eastward at dawn on the 27th. Not until 2.30 P.M. was there any sign of the enemy advancing south in this quarter,[1] and then the 3rd Cavalry Brigade fell back deliberately to Itancourt (4 miles south-east of St. Quentin), E Battery exchanging a few rounds with the German guns before it retired. West of St. Quentin the 9th Lancers (2nd Cavalry Brigade) found contact with the enemy near Fresnoy, but did not withdraw from that place until 6 P.M. and then only to Savy (south-west of St. Quentin). There they and the greater part of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade took up their billets for the night, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade being on their right at Itancourt, and the 1st in support at Grand Seraucourt.

Further to the west, the 3rd Division was hardly more molested than the 5th. After turning west from Bellicourt (8 miles north by west of St. Quentin), it halted from 9 A.M. until 1 P.M. at Hargicourt, and then continued its way south to Villeret (2 miles south-west of Bellicourt). There a small party of German cavalry, accompanied by guns, made some demonstration of pursuit, but speedily retired when greeted by a few rifle bullets from 109th Battery, having no wish to engage what seemed to be British infantry. The division next marched to Vermand, where supplies were issued about 4 P.M., and at 10 P.M. it resumed its march to Ham. The 9th Infantry Brigade acted as rear guard throughout, having suffered little in the battle of Le Cateau.

The 4th Division on the left was followed up rather more closely by the German cavalry. The 11th Infantry Brigade, from Serain, moved across country to Nauroy, just to the south-east of Bellicourt, on the morning of the 27th, and halted there at 8.30 A.M. to allow the 3rd Division to pass. Rather more than an hour later the Corps Cavalry of the II. Corps reported the enemy's presence in the adjacent villages; and before the brigade had left its billets, German guns opened on Nauroy at a range of a thousand yards. To cover the retirement of the brigade,

[1] The enemy seen, according to Bülow's Sketch Map 2, was divisional cavalry of the *VII. Corps*, the right of his Army.

the brigadier ordered Colonel Jackson of the Hampshire to engage the guns. Acting on these orders, the latter sent two parties to take up a position to the east of Nauroy and open fire on them. After an engagement with enemy's dismounted cavalry and cyclists, Colonel Jackson was wounded and taken prisoner, but his men stood fast until the retiring brigade was out of sight, and then withdrew, eventually rejoining the brigade on the high ground beyond the canal. The main body meanwhile had moved south-west to Villeret, picking up *en route* Major Prowse's party of the Somerset L.I. from Ligny, a party of the 1/Rifle Brigade under Captain Prittie, and other men who had stayed late on the battlefield. Thence the 11th Infantry Brigade, "fairly all right" as it reported, marched through Tertry, where it struck the divisional route to Voyennes. 27 Aug. 1914.

The 10th Infantry Brigade and 4th Cavalry Brigade (in touch with General Sordet's cavalry on the left) had meanwhile passed on to Roisel (8 miles south-west of Le Catelet), where both made a short halt; the 12th Infantry Brigade, which had gone on with the 4th Divisional Artillery, deployed at Ronssoy (4 miles south-west of Le Catelet), with the Carabiniers at Lempire to cover it, as there were indications, from German aeroplanes flying over the division and the appearance of a few cavalry scouts, that the enemy might be in close pursuit. Nothing, however, happened. The 10th Infantry Brigade then pursued its way to Hancourt, where it arrived at 4 P.M. The 12th Infantry Brigade retired from Ronssoy at 11 A.M., and reached Hancourt between 5.30 and 6 P.M., where Major Parker's party of the King's Own overtook it. At Hancourt, by divisional orders, these two brigades entrenched and rested, awaiting the enemy; but none appeared. At 9.30 P.M. (all wounded and transport, which included many requisitioned and country wagons, having been sent off two hours earlier) the march of the 4th Division was resumed in inky darkness by Vraignes, Monchy Lagache, and Matigny upon Voyennes. There was not the slightest hindrance from the enemy, but men and horses were so utterly weary that the usual hourly halts were omitted for fear that if the whole division were once halted and the men sat or lay down, they would never be got moving again.

The stoppages and checks inseparable from the march of a long column in the dark were doubly nerve-racking to the Staff during this period; for not only might they mean

that the division would be delayed and have incredible difficulty in restarting—as men were lying on the roads careless of whether wheels went over them or not—but also that enemy cavalry had cut in ahead or on the flank of the column. With strained ears the officers listened for firing, and only breathed again when the tremor of movement crept down the column, and they heard the glad sound of the crunch of wheels on the road. Such was the discipline, however, that not a single shot was fired in alarm during this and the many other nights of marching in August and September 1914. Parties sent on ahead blocked all side and cross roads, so that units, even if gaps in the column occurred, could not go astray. Measures were taken by the interpreters [1] in all the villages passed through to detect the presence of spies, generally by the simple process of a language test. But for this precaution and the difficulties of adjusting the foreign harness of the requisitioned vehicles, officers and men for the most part might have dreamed as they mechanically moved on that they were back at autumn manœuvres.

The Carabiniers remained in position about Lempire till noon, by which time German infantry came into sight; but, though heavily shelled, the 4th Cavalry Brigade withdrew unharmed to Hesbecourt, and after waiting there till 2.30 P.M. fell back westwards in rear of the 4th Division by Bernes, Hancourt and Cartigny to Le Mesnil, thence going south, finally crossing the Somme after nightfall and reaching Rouy, near Voyennes, at 1 A.M. on the 28th. The 4th Division, three hours later—at 4 A.M.—began passing the Somme valley into Voyennes, at the very spot where Henry V. had crossed the river in his retreat northwards on Agincourt. At Voyennes Brigadier-General Hunter-Weston with the main body of the 11th Infantry Brigade rejoined.

Thus by dawn on the 28th, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien had practically brought the whole of his force to the south of the Somme, thirty-five miles from the battlefield of the 26th.

The position of the various formations was approximately as follows :—

Sketch 3. Maps 3 & 13. 1st, 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Brigades :
In a semi-circle, four miles south of St. Quentin, from Itancourt, through Urvillers and Grand Seraucourt to Savy.

[1] A French officer or soldier was allotted to each Staff and unit as interpreter and go-between in business with the local officials.

The remainder of the force was south of the Somme, with rear guards on the northern bank. 28 Aug. 1914.

5th Division and 19th Infantry Brigade :
South-west of the cavalry brigades, at Ollezy and Eaucourt, near where the Crozat canal meets the Somme.

3rd Division :
On the left of the 5th :
7th Infantry Brigade—Ham, on the Somme.
8th Infantry Brigade—On march to Ham from Vermand.
9th Infantry Brigade—Ham.

4th Division :
On the left of the 3rd, at Voyennes on the Somme.

4th Cavalry Brigade :
On the left of the 4th Division, at Rouy.

I. Corps and 5th Cavalry Brigade were 18 miles to the north-eastward of the II. Corps, on the high ground south of Guise. Their movements will be dealt with in the next chapter.

It was tolerably evident that the German pursuit, if it can be said ever to have been seriously begun, had been shaken off. There were, as a matter of fact, already some indications that von Kluck was pressing south-westward rather than southward. General Sordet's Cavalry Corps and the 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions had been in conflict with German troops about Péronne on the afternoon of the 27th ; and British cavalry entering St. Quentin at dawn on the 28th found no sign of the enemy. These indications, however, came too late to be of any help to the British Commander-in-Chief on the 27th. As regards the German *II. Corps*, the most westerly of von Kluck's Army, the reports of air reconnaissances in the early morning, taken in conjunction with General Smith-Dorrien's verbal report at midnight on the 26th/27th after the battle of Le Cateau, were reassuring. The road from Le Cateau was absolutely clear ; there were neither British rear guards nor German advanced guards to be seen south of a line drawn east and west through Péronne. But, further east, a heavy column[1] had been observed moving southward on the road between La Groise and Étreux (12 and 6 miles, respectively, north of Guise), besides other troops at Le Nouvion (10 miles north-east of Guise) ; and Sir John French had as yet no clear information to show whether these were friendly or hostile. General Joffre, who visited him at Noyon at 11 A.M. on the 27th,

[1] Von Bülow's *X. Reserve Corps*.

### *II. Corps.*

The heads of the two divisions reached Avesnes le Sec and Bouchain, 9 miles from Cambrai, on the night of the 25th/26th.

The official "Schlachten und Gefechte" states that the *3rd Division* was engaged at Cambrai on the 26th. The *4th Division* is known by contact with the French to have been west of Cambrai. At night it reached Hermies, 10 miles south-west of Cambrai. No doubt von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps*, having gone eastwards, the *4th Division* was acting as flank guard and watching the French 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions, which were west of Cambrai,[1] whilst the *3rd* attacked Cambrai; the corps was later pushed on to intercept the British retreat westwards. The headquarters of the corps at night were at Pallencourt, five miles north of Cambrai.

### *II. Cavalry Corps (von der Marwitz).*

This corps spent the night of the 25th/26th August in villages around Avesnes lez Aubert (6 miles N.N.E. of Cambrai). Its orders for the 26th were to continue the pursuit due south "against "the great Roman Road Bavai—Maretz—Nauroy."[2]

"*2nd Cavalry Division*, with the *4th* and *7th Jäger*, via Carnières "and Esnes against Beaurevoir.

"*9th Cavalry Division*, with the *3rd*, *9th* and *10th Jäger*, via "Beauvois against Prémont.

"*4th Cavalry Division* via Caudry against Maretz."

Thus, the *2nd Cavalry Division*, with two *Jäger* battalions, struck the 12th Infantry Brigade; the one brigade of the *9th Cavalry Division* and three *Jäger* battalions, the 11th Infantry Brigade, and the *4th Cavalry Division*, with the two brigades of the *9th*, the 7th Infantry Brigade.

After an initial surprise, the *2nd Cavalry Division* was fought to a standstill (this is confirmed by Wirth), and retired to shelter until relieved by the arrival of the *IV. Reserve Corps*.

The position of the *9th Cavalry Division* soon became critical (*verdammt kritisch*), but it hung on until "about 2 P.M., when "reinforcements came up [probably from the *8th Division*] and "the artillery belaboured the enemy's position."

The *4th Cavalry Division* does not claim to have done much, and "its losses were comparatively small. . . . Towards 11 A.M. the "infantry of the *IV. Corps* (*8th Division*) entered the fight, and "the attack was then carried forward to Béthancourt."

At dusk the *II. Cavalry Corps* was withdrawn and concentrated at Naves and Cauroir, two villages a couple of miles north-east and east of Cambrai.

[1] See p. 186.

[2] "Deutsche Kavallerie," pp. 55-63. A detailed account of the action of the German cavalry at Le Cateau, extracted from this book, will be found in the "Army Quarterly," January 1922.

## CHAPTER X

### OTHER EVENTS OF THE 26TH-28TH AUGUST

### THE 26TH AUGUST: REAR-GUARD AFFAIR OF LE GRAND FAYT

(See Sketches 3, 4 & 5; Maps 2, 3, 9, 12 & 13)

IT is now time to return to the I. Corps and see what it was doing on the morning of the 26th whilst the II. Corps was engaged at the battle of Le Cateau. Sketch 3. Maps 3, 9 & 13.

Whatever loss the Germans may have suffered in their repulse by the Guards at Landrecies, they had succeeded in disturbing the repose of the I. Corps and in keeping it on the alert all night in expectation of an attack. Its strategic position, besides, was far from satisfactory; for the Germans appeared to be about to break in between it and the II. Corps, and to be threatening the flank of its retreat from the west. Soon after midnight, from his headquarters at Le Grand Fayt, five miles from Landrecies, Sir Douglas Haig took measures to meet the situation, and to occupy a position facing north and north-west. The trains, after dumping supplies, were ordered off southward to Étreux, carrying the men's packs in the empty lorries. The 1st Division was ordered to take position near Favril, a mile and a half S.S.E. of Landrecies, to cover the withdrawal of the 2nd Division on its right. The 2nd Division was divided, part retiring to the right and part to the left rear of the 1st Division, as under :—

The 5th and 6th Infantry Brigades to close in from Noyelles and Maroilles upon Le Grand Fayt (4 miles east of Favril);
The 4th (Guards) Brigade to retire as soon as possible from Landrecies on La Groise (south-west of Favril);
The 5th Cavalry Brigade to cover the west flank of the corps between Ors and Catillon.

The French Reserve divisions on the right of the corps

1st Division : Fesmy, Petit Cambresis, Oisy.
2nd Division : Étreux, Venerolles.
5th Cavalry Brigade : Hannapes.
Corps Hqrs. : 1½ miles east of Hannapes.

The II. Corps and 4th Division, and remaining cavalry brigades were 18 miles to the west, in retreat south-westward to the Oise, on the front of St. Quentin—Le Catelet.

The French 53rd and 69th Reserve Divisions were to the south-east of the I. Corps at Iron and Lavaqueresse.

### 27th August : Rear-guard Affair of Étreux

Sketch 3. Maps 3, 12 & 13.

At 1 A.M. on the 27th the Staff of the French Fifth Army arranged with General Haig that the road through Guise should be left to the British;[1] and, since there was no choice but for the whole of the I. Corps to march by this single highway, unless part were sent by less direct roads on the west side of the Oise, all vehicles were "double-banked," and staff officers were sent forward to Guise to provide for the passage of two distinct streams of traffic through the town. The operation promised to be critical, in view of the gap between the I. and II. Corps having widened rather than decreased on the 26th, while to the north and north-east the enemy was reported to be in considerable strength. The situation was not rendered less anxious by a false report, which was current early in the afternoon, that he was also in great force just to the north of St. Quentin. General Maxse's (the 1st, Guards) Brigade was detailed as rear guard to both divisions; General Bulfin's (2nd Infantry) Brigade as a western flank guard; and the 2/Welch, with the 46th Battery R.F.A., as eastern flank guard. Great stress was laid on the importance of holding the enemy at a distance from the high ground on the north-west between Fesmy and Wassigny, so that he should be unable to bombard Étreux, where supplies were to be issued to the troops as they passed through. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was sent well to the west on the other side of the Oise, with instructions to follow a route, parallel to the divisions, by Grougis, Aisonville, Noyales and Hauteville. Meanwhile, Brigadier-General Chetwode, its commander, led it to a central position five miles to the west of Étreux, between Mennevret and Le Petit Verly, and pushed out patrols to the north and north-west.

[1] The Reserve divisions crossed the Oise by bridges above Guise.

The corps was under way by 4 A.M., the 1st Division remaining in a covering position until the 2nd Division had moved off. The latter reached its billets without the slightest molestation, but the march for the 5th Infantry Brigade from Barzy to Neuvillette (8 miles south-west of Guise) was long; the 2/Highland Light Infantry, in particular, having been employed in repairing the roads at dawn, did not arrive at its halting-place until 10 P.M., after a tramp of thirty miles. The false alarm of the enemy's presence at St. Quentin kept the entire division in movement longer than would otherwise have been necessary, for the 4th (Guards) Brigade was sent out westward as a flank guard, and the 6th Infantry Brigade spent the night entrenching itself just east of the 5th, about Mont d'Origny. 27 Aug. 1914.

Meanwhile, until late in the afternoon, the 1st Division remained in position, with rear and flank guards out, waiting for the road to be clear; but there was no sign of serious pressure upon the line north-west of Étreux, to which so much importance was attached. In General Maxse's rear guard, the 1/Coldstream were about Oisy (2 miles north of Étreux) beyond the canal, and the 1/Black Watch and 1/Scots Guards just to the west of them, in touch with the western flank guard at Wassigny; the Munster Fusiliers, with two troops of the 15th Hussars and a section of the 118th Battery R.F.A., all under Major Charrier of the Munsters, formed the rear party east of the Sambre Canal, and had been under arms, facing north-east, since dawn. The general position of this party was four miles from Étreux, and extended for two miles, from Bergues through Fesmy to Chapeau Rouge, where it struck the north—south road from Landrecies to Étreux. The eastern flank guard was in position to the south-east, on the hill south of Bergues. The ground here falls gently westwards to the Sambre Canal, which flows first on one side then on the other of the Landrecies road. The country lent itself to defence, being divided into small enclosures by thick hedges, which were passable at certain gaps only. During the morning a thick white mist lay upon the ground, and later there was a thunder-storm, so that visibility was never good. Map 12.

Two companies of the Munsters were about Chapeau Rouge as screen, watching the roads that run north-westwards and northwards to Catillon and La Groise, and the remainder of the rear party were half a mile to the south-east

in front of Fesmy. Later, half a company, and one troop of the 15th Hussars, were pushed south-eastwards to Bergues. No sign of the enemy was seen until 9 A.M., when a German cavalry patrol came down the road to Chapeau Rouge from the north, halted within five hundred yards, and fired a few shots. The Munsters made no reply, but the Germans came no closer. There were indications of another column of the enemy to the north-east, moving south-westwards from Prisches upon Le Sart straight at the centre of Major Charrier's force; but its advanced party had galloped back on the appearance of a corporal of the 15th Hussars. By 9.30 A.M. all was again quiet, and Lieut.-Colonel Morland of the 2/Welch informed Major Charrier that he was going to withdraw the eastern flank guard to Boué (2 miles north-east of Étreux). General Maxse directed the Munsters to hold on to their position until ordered or forced to retire; and Major Charrier sent word to the general that, the choice of the route being left to him, he also should fall back by the road to Boué. The best part of an hour passed away, when, towards 10.30 A.M., German infantry came down again from the north-east, and opened an attack on Bergues, which a little later was extended also to Chapeau Rouge. The Munsters being by this time entrenched, held their own with little difficulty; the two guns found a target in a German column to the north-west, and all went well.

At 11 A.M., whilst this action was in progress, the 3rd Infantry Brigade was at last able to start southward from Oisy; and at the same time Colonel Morland's flank guard also moved south upon Boué. The firing died away, and at noon General Maxse confirmed Major Charrier's choice of the road for his retreat, at the same time sending to all units of the rear guard their final instructions for retirement, the hour only being left blank. By 12.20 P.M. the road at Étreux was reported clear of all transport; and a little later General Maxse despatched orders (time 1 P.M.) to every unit of the rear guard, "Retire at once." This message, though sent by two routes, failed to reach the Munster Fusiliers.

Meanwhile, at 12.30 P.M. or thereabouts, German infantry developed its attack in greater strength on both flanks, at Bergues and at Chapeau Rouge, though, as yet, without the support of artillery. As the pressure became heavier, in accordance with Major Charrier's orders, the

two companies at Chapeau Rouge gradually withdrew south-eastwards towards Fesmy. The men, finding good shelter in the ditches by the side of the road, worked their way back with very slight loss, and by shooting down the Germans as they showed themselves at the gaps in the hedges, forbade any close pursuit. The guns also opened fire, first towards the north, and later to the north-east, in which quarter the enemy was now observed to be in greatest force. Following the Munsters up slowly, the Germans delivered a strong attack upon Fesmy, their guns now coming into action for the first time; but they made little progress. The Munsters' machine guns did very deadly work, firing down the road from Fesmy to Le Sart; but although the Germans tried to mask their advance by driving cattle down on the defenders, it was to no purpose. At 1.15 P.M. Major Charrier sent to General Maxse this short message: "Am holding on to position north of "Fesmy village, being attacked by force of all arms. Get-"ting on well. The Germans are driving cattle in front of "them up to us for cover. We are killing plenty of them." 27 Aug. 1914.

Thus holding his own, Major Charrier's chief anxiety was for his detachment at Bergues. He pushed out a platoon to the eastward, in the hope of gaining touch with it, but the platoon was driven back by superior numbers; and, in fact, the troops at Bergues were about this time forced out of the village and compelled to retreat southward to a farm. Here after checking German pursuit by fire and then counter-attacking, the detachment retired westward to the Sambre Canal, and thence down the road to Oisy.

Meanwhile, Major Charrier continued his defence of Fesmy with great spirit; he had now the whole of his battalion, except the half-company at Bergues, under his hand; and he had need of them. So resolute was the onset of the Germans that, in places, they approached to within a hundred and fifty yards of the village, and a few actually broke into it and shot down two of the artillery wagon teams. Every one of these bold men was killed or captured, and at 1.50 P.M. Major Charrier sent off the last message which came through from him to General Maxse: "We have German wounded prisoners, who say that about "two regiments are opposing us and some guns. They "belong to the *15th Regiment*"—that is to say, to the *VII. Corps* of the German *Second Army*.[1]

[1] They really belonged to the *15th Reserve Infantry Regiment* of the *2nd Guard Reserve Division*. The German official list of battles shows

About this time—1.45 to 2 P.M.—the 2nd Infantry Brigade, the western flank guard, marched away from Wassigny for Hannapes, south of Étreux, with little hindrance; the Northamptons, who brought up the rear, lost only four men, and claimed on their side from forty to fifty German troopers killed, wounded or taken prisoner.[1] Thus the greater part of the 1st Division was now in motion to the south; the 3rd Infantry Brigade was within an hour's march of Guise; and there remained only the rear guard to bring off. Major Charrier, having struck the enemy hard, with little loss to himself, at 2.30 P.M. threw out flank guards wide upon each side and began his retreat upon Oisy. The movement was necessarily slow, the flanking parties being impeded by hedges; and it was some time before the rearmost of the Munsters and the two guns left Fesmy. At 3 P.M. the cyclist, who had failed to deliver the copy of General Maxse's final order to Major Charrier, reached the Coldstream Guards near Oisy, and gave them their instructions to retire forthwith. Simultaneously, the detachment of the 15th Hussars and Munster Fusiliers from Bergues came into Oisy and took
Map 3. over the guard of the bridge there. But it was now evident that the gap between the rear guard and the corps was increasing rapidly: the 3rd Infantry Brigade being by this time at Guise; the 2nd Infantry Brigade closing in upon Hannapes, some five miles in rear; whilst the 1st, at another five miles distance, was still in position at Oisy. The 3rd Infantry Brigade was therefore halted at Guise, and the 1/South Wales Borderers and the XXVI. Brigade R.F.A. were sent back north about three miles to Maison Rouge, where at 3.30 P.M. they took up a position to cover the retreat of the 1st (Guards) Brigade.

By that hour the Coldstream Guards, Scots Guards and Black Watch had begun to withdraw, the northern of the two bridges over the canal near Oisy being blown up after the last man had crossed it; and shortly after 4 P.M. the rear-guard cavalry reported strong hostile columns moving south upon La Vallée Mulâtre, immediately to the west of Wassigny. The three battalions, upon reaching the level

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that the *2nd Guard Reserve Division* of the *X. Reserve Corps* was engaged at Fesmy on the 27th August.

[1] They belonged to the *16th Uhlans*, the corps cavalry of the *VII. Corps*, the right of the *Second Army* (see Cramm's "Geschichte des Ulanen-regiments, No. 16," p. 106).

plateau to the south of Étreux, found themselves threatened from the north and west by a German cavalry division[1] and two batteries. There was a good deal of firing as they retired over the next three miles of ground to the southward, but it was confined chiefly to the artillery; for the enemy was held at a distance without much difficulty by the British batteries at Maison Rouge. Thus the three battalions reached Guise with trifling loss, the 5th Cavalry Brigade retiring parallel to them on the west. The firing died down at dusk, and the 1st Division went into bivouac, the 3rd Infantry Brigade at Bernot, just north of the 2nd Division at Mont D'Origny, at 9 P.M., and the 2nd and 1st Brigades at Hauteville and Jonqueuse, north-east and east of Bernot, at 11 P.M. The 2/Welch of the eastern flank guard also reached Bernot at this hour; it had been much impeded by refugees, but beyond suffering a good deal of sniping, had not been interfered with by the enemy. The 5th Cavalry Brigade also came into the same area for the night; and the detachment of 15th Hussars at Oisy marched southward on to Mont d'Origny, which it reached at midnight. The men were greatly fatigued by their long and trying day, but they had been little pressed by the Germans. A cavalry division had, indeed, appeared very late from the north-westward, but no infantry had threatened them from the north, and the reason for this must now be told. 27 Aug. 1914.

As it left Fesmy the rearmost company of the Munsters had become engaged with German infantry, but was able to disengage and rejoin the main body of the battalion, then, about 5.45 P.M., half-way to Étreux, and continue its retreat. But as it approached the village, Germans were seen crossing the road ahead, and fire was opened not only by German infantry from the houses on the northern outskirts, but from a battery not more than fifteen hundred yards away to the eastward. Then for the first time the Munsters began to fall fast. One of the two guns of the section of the 118th Battery was disabled, a single shell destroying the whole team. The other gun was promptly brought into action against the German artillery, but over three hundred rounds had already been fired, and ammunition was very nearly exhausted. Still undaunted, Major Charrier pushed forward two companies to clear the way through Étreux; but the Germans had Map 12.

[1] The *Guard Cavalry Division* of Richthofen's *Corps*.

installed themselves in the trenches dug during the forenoon by the Black Watch, and also occupied a house, which they had loopholed, west of the road. A house east of the road now burst into flames, evidently giving the signal for a converging attack from all sides upon the Munsters. Major Charrier ordered the remaining gun to be brought up to demolish the loopholed house, but the range was so short that the team and detachment were instantly shot down. A third company, which was supporting the advance of the two companies, was then sent to make an attack on the railway-cutting to the east of Étreux station. In spite of enfilade fire, both of infantry and artillery, the company worked up to within seventy yards of the cutting and charged. The men were mowed down on all sides, and only one officer reached the hedge, with one man, who was then killed by his side.

Meanwhile Major Charrier had led three charges against the loopholed house, in one of which his adjutant actually reached the building, and fired his revolver through a loophole, only to drop stunned by a blow from falling brick-work. These gallant efforts were all in vain. It was now 7 p.m. The Germans attacked from south, east and west, and, though temporarily driven back at one point by a bayonet charge, continued to advance. Major Charrier was shot dead alongside the deserted gun on the road ; and so many officers had by this time fallen, that the command devolved upon Lieutenant E. W. Gower. Collecting such men as were left, he formed them in an orchard, facing to all points of the compass, and continued to resist. Gradually the Germans crowded in on them from three sides, bringing fresh machine guns into position, and at 9.15 P.M. they closed in also from the north, and the little band of not more than two hundred and fifty of all ranks with ammunition almost spent, was overpowered. The Munsters had been fighting against overwhelming odds for nearly twelve hours, and discovered at the end that they had been matched against at least six battalions of the *73rd* and *77th Reserve Infantry Regiments*, of the *19th Reserve Division*, besides three of the *15th Regiment* of the *2nd Guard Reserve Division*, all forming part of the *X. Reserve Corps*. Beyond question, they arrested the enemy's pursuit in this quarter for fully six hours, and their heroic sacrifice was not made in vain.

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# OPERATIONS, 28 AUGUST - 5 SEPTEMBER, 1914.

*Retreat of B.E.F.*

*Positions at night are shown by dates.*

Ordnance Survey, 1920

SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION AT MIDNIGHT: 27TH/28TH AUGUST

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I. Corps. | On the high ground southwards of Guise from Longchamps to Mont d'Origny, with the 5th Cavalry Brigade and 4th (Guards) Brigade west of the river Oise about Hauteville and Bernot. | 28 Aug. 1914. Sketch 3. Maps 3 & 13. |
| 5th Cavalry Brigade. | | |
| 1st, 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Brigades (portions). | South of St. Quentin from Itancourt to Savy. | |
| II. Corps. | Still 18 miles to the southwestward of the I. Corps. | |
| 4th Division. | Part south of the Somme from Ham to Rouy; the remainder within four hours' march of the Somme. | |
| 4th Cavalry Brigade. | | |

## THE I. CORPS ON 28TH AUGUST

At dawn on the 28th, although the weather was still extremely hot, the retreat of the I. Corps on La Fère was resumed under more favourable conditions; for, although two German divisions were reported from eight to twelve miles north of St. Quentin, the rumour that they were actually in that town was proved to be false;[1] and, moreover, the French XVIII. Corps was now in touch with the British on the east. The transport began to move off at 2 A.M. In addition to a rear guard, a flank guard (under Brigadier-General Horne) consisting of the 5th Cavalry Brigade, 5th Infantry Brigade and XXXVI. Brigade R.F.A., was thrown out to the west; and the rear guard, the 2nd Infantry Brigade with a brigade of artillery and a squadron, held the heights of Mont d'Origny during the passage of the main body through Origny. Nothing was seen of the enemy until shortly after noon, when a German column of all arms appeared, working round towards the right rear of the 2nd Infantry Brigade, and about 12.30 P.M. its guns opened fire, but with little effect.[2] The German infantry made some semblance of attack, but was

[1] On the night of the 27th/28th, the German *III.*, *IV.* and *IV. Reserve Corps* were 6 miles from St. Quentin on a front facing south and southwest (Kluck).

[2] From von Bülow's map, the column would appear to belong to the *X. Corps* then, with the rest of the *Second Army*, moving south-westward. Later in the day, that Army turned south.

easily held at a distance, and at 2 P.M. the last of the British battalions marched off, covered by infantry of Valabrègue's Reserve divisions, which occupied the position as they vacated it. The I. Corps then made its way, always by a single highroad, towards La Fère. The march was again most trying, for on the greater part of the way battalions, as well as transport, were "double-banked," and a swarm of refugees added to the congestion. Thus, choked with dust, on an airless, oppressive day, the I. Corps at last reached La Fère, crossed the Oise southwards, and, in the course of the afternoon, reached its billets:—the 1st Division just south of La Fère at Fressancourt, Bertaucourt and St. Gobain; the 2nd Division further to the westward at Andelain, Servais and Amigny.

It remained to be seen whether the German cavalry would press into the gap between the I. and II. Corps, which was still some fifteen miles wide. It will be remembered that on this day the 3rd Cavalry Brigade had been pushed eastwards by Major-General Allenby to gain touch with the I. Corps.[1] Early in the forenoon the brigade was in position six or seven miles south of St. Quentin, between Cérizy and Essigny, when at 10 A.M. firing was heard to the north, which was followed shortly afterwards by the appearance of French Territorial infantrymen retiring south from St. Quentin through Essigny. Learning from them that they had been surprised by German cavalry and artillery at Bellenglise, Brigadier-General Gough withdrew his right, the 4th Hussars, southwards from near Essigny to Benay, to cover their retreat. After a time, his patrols reported a brigade of Uhlans to be advancing on Essigny and a second column of all arms further to the east, moving on Cérizy. About 1 P.M. an advanced party of Uhlans was caught in ambush by the 4th Hussars about Benay and dispersed with loss, their killed being identified as Uhlans of the *Guard Cavalry Division.* The column in rear of them thereupon attempted to work round General Gough's eastern flank, but was stopped by the guns of E Battery R.H.A. Thus what seems to have been the western column of the *Guard Cavalry Division* was brought, with comparative ease, to a standstill.

[1] See p. 199.

### The Affair of Cérizy

The eastern column of the German cavalry was more enterprising, but no more successful. As commander of the left flank guard of the I. Corps, Brigadier-General Horne[1] had sent the whole of the 5th Cavalry Brigade to the western bank of the Oise, and, at 10.30 A.M., Sir Philip Chetwode moved it to Moy, a village nearly abreast and 2 miles east of Cérizy, where he halted in the Oise valley; and leaving the Scots Greys on outpost, with the 20th Hussars in close support, on the high ground to the north-west by La Guinguette Farm, he rested the remainder of the brigade in Moy. About noon the enemy came into sight, advancing south along the main road from St. Quentin. Upon this a squadron of the Scots Greys, with a machine gun, was sent to occupy a copse on the eastern side of the road a little to the north of La Guinguette Farm (on the St. Quentin—La Fère road, ½ mile east of Cérizy), with one troop pushed forward to a building near the road about half a mile ahead, and a section of J Battery R.H.A. was unlimbered about half a mile to the south-east of the copse. The advanced troop of the Greys was driven back by superior numbers, but all attempts of hostile patrols to penetrate to La Guinguette were foiled by the fire of the remainder of the squadron. At length, at 2 P.M., two squadrons of the enemy advanced in close formation on the eastern side of the road, and, being fired on both by the Greys and by the two guns, dismounted. Most of their horses, terrified by the bursting shells, galloped away, and the troopers, after discharging a few rounds, also turned tail. Thereupon, General Chetwode at once ordered the rest of J Battery into action and directed the 12th Lancers, with two squadrons of the Greys in support, to move round the enemy's eastern flank, and the 20th Hussars to advance along the St. Quentin road and turn them from the west. The dismounted Germans meanwhile made off in all haste, but the leading squadron, C, and the machine-gun section of the 12th Lancers, hurrying northward, caught sight of a body of German cavalry, about eight hundred yards away, moving in close formation towards Moy. Attacking it with fire, the 12th Lancers compelled the Germans to dismount, and then stampeded their horses. The two

[1] See p. 213.

other squadrons and J Battery now coming into action, C squadron mounted and, led by Lieut.-Colonel Wormald, approaching over dead ground, got within fifty yards of the enemy and charged. Some seventy or eighty of the Germans, who proved to be the *2nd Guard Dragoon Regiment*, were speared. The 12th Lancers lost one officer and four men killed, and the lieutenant-colonel and four men wounded. Further pursuit would obviously have been imprudent, but General Chetwode remained on his ground long enough to collect all his wounded—his casualties did not exceed thirty—and to ascertain that his guns had played such havoc with the German reserves that their total losses might fairly be reckoned at three hundred killed and wounded. Finally towards evening, he and General Gough fell back independently, the former to the left of the I. Corps, to Sinceny and Autreville, the latter to rejoin the Cavalry Division, west of the Oise canal at Frières (6 miles W.N.W. of La Fère) and Jussy (just north of Frières). Though the action at La Guinguette had been comparatively insignificant, it had very effectually damped the ardour of the German cavalry.[1]

### General Situation on Night of 28th/29th August

Sketch 3. Map 13. When all movements had been completed on the night of the 28th/29th August, the I. Corps was south of the

Map 3. [1] The Chaplain of the *Guard Cavalry Division*, Dr. Vogel, gives the following account of this action. After relating the march of the division on the 28th August from La Groise via Wassigny and Bohain to Homblières (3 miles east of St. Quentin), which it reached at 1 P.M., and a fight around St. Quentin with two battalions of the French 10th Territorial Infantry Regiment (von Kluck says that his *III. Corps* was also engaged there) which lasted until 7 P.M., he states that in the course of this "a report came from the Dragoons that they were in a severe "action east of Urvillers [4 miles north-west of Moy whence the British "5th Cavalry Brigade had moved]. They had stumbled on what appeared "to be weak enemy infantry in the wood south-west of the village, and "had attacked with three squadrons dismounted, intending to charge with "the other three. It turned out, however, that the brigade had to deal, "not with disorganized fugitives, but with a strong detachment of the "intact Franco-British Army that had advanced from La Fère. This was "evident from the lively infantry fusilade which they received as they "approached mounted. It was not easy to get clear (*Loslösung war nicht "leicht*), but with the assistance of a battery, the brigade succeeded in "withdrawing behind the hill north of the wood, which was held by the "*Guard Schützenbataillon*. Some British squadrons which also had deployed "to charge were driven back by our guns, which opened at just the right "moment. The *3rd Guard Uhlans* now reinforced the troops holding the "hill. A troop of the Dragoons, under Lieutenant Graf Schwerin, was "ridden over by British Hussars. The wounded, amongst whom were "men with six or seven lance wounds, and several bullet wounds, were "taken prisoner by the enemy."

Oise and of La Fère; the II. Corps, with the 4th Division, was north and east of Noyon, with one division south of the Oise. Thus, the two wings of the Army were still 11 miles apart, the gap between them being more or less covered by cavalry in a curve from the left of the I. Corps to the northern end of the II. Corps. On the right, the British were 6 miles in rear of the left of the French Fifth Army, but on the left in touch with Sordet's cavalry. Night of 28/29 Aug. 1914.

In greater detail, the positions of the British were : Map 3.

I. Corps :
On the northern edge of the Forest of St. Gobain and Coucy, from Fressancourt to Amigny.
5th Cavalry Brigade : Sinceny.

II. Corps (including 4th Division and 19th Infantry Brigade and Cavalry Division) :
1st, 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Brigades :
At Berlancourt, Flavy le Meldeux—Plessis, and Jussy, respectively.
3rd, 4th and 5th Divisions :
From Freniches, south and east, through Genvry to Pontoise.
4th Cavalry Brigade :
Cressy (3 miles south of Nesle) north-west of the 4th Division.

From the 28th onward every day was to bring the two wings closer to each other. Sir John French, after meeting some of the 5th Division on the march, as has already been told, had motored on to La Fère to see the I. Corps, and had satisfied himself as to the good spirit of the troops. He had also received the promise of the 6th Division from England about the middle of September and of a complete corps from India at a later date. Other important intelligence also reached him. The troops of General d'Amade, together with General Sordet's Cavalry Corps, had been seen in action between Péronne and Bray sur Somme, but by evening it appeared that they had been pressed back. There was good reason to believe that German headquarters judged the British Army to be beaten beyond hope of speedy recovery, and were intent upon extending their enveloping movement westwards until they could sweep all opposing forces into their net.

General Joffre, during his visit to Sir John French on the 27th, had mentioned the preparation of a counter-

stroke and the formation of a new Army on his left. The first sign of it was seen on this day in the arrival of units between Amiens and Ham. This Army, the Sixth, under General Maunoury, was to be formed between the British and General d'Amade. As a beginning, the VII. Corps,[1] brought from Belfort, was detraining at Villers Bretonneux, to the east of Amiens, and a Moroccan brigade was already assembled further to the east.[2] On the same day General Joffre—his Western Armies being on the general line Rheims—Amiens—ordered the French Fifth Army to take the offensive towards St. Quentin along a line parallel to the Oise from Guise to La Fère, hoping at best to strike an effective blow which might check the German advance, and at least relieve the British Army from all further pressure.[3]

On the evening of the 28th August, the French Fifth Army was disposed on the arc of a circle opposite Guise from Vervins to Vendeuil (3 miles north of La Fère).[4] It was thus in touch with, but in advance of, the British Army. During the day, General Valabrègue's Reserve divisions, which since the night of the 25th/26th, as already described, had marched so close to the I. Corps as sometimes to share its roads, had had hard fighting on the Oise bridges at Guise and in its neighbourhood, and had withdrawn at nightfall to the left of the line of the Fifth Army.

Sir John French issued orders at 11.30 P.M.[5] for the British to halt and rest on the 29th, but with the condition that all formations should be withdrawn to the south of

[1] 14th Division and 63rd Reserve Division. The 13th Division remained in Alsace.

[2] According to von Kluck, von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* "was "surprised in its billets [near Péronne] by the French 61st and 62nd Reserve "Divisions (of d'Amade's force) on the morning of the 28th. The French, "however, were driven from the field at Manancourt (7 miles S.W. of "Bapaume) by parts of the *II. Corps* and *IV. Reserve Corps*." This was the action of Mesnil (Palat, vol. v. pp. 141-2).

[3] The orders, according to General Lanrezac ("Le Plan de Campagne Français," p. 218) were verbal: "Take the offensive *à fond* on St. Quentin and as soon as possible, without bothering about the English." Palat, vol. v. p. 170, states: "The situation of the British Army, constantly "menaced in rear and on the left flank, naturally pre-occupied the General-"in-Chief. He judged it necessary to diminish the enemy pressure on it "by carrying out a counter-offensive with the Fifth Army." Hanotaux, vol. viii. p. 82, says, "Avant tout, il faut fixer, c'est-à-dire sauver, l'armée britannique."

[4] Palat, vol. v., and Hanotaux, "La Bataille de Guise—St. Quentin, 28-30 août 1914" ("Revue des Deux Mondes," September 1918).

[5] Appendix 18.

a line practically east and west through Nesle and Ham, connecting with the French at Vendeuil. During the evening of the 28th, Sir Douglas Haig was asked by General Lanrezac to co-operate in his coming offensive; but on informing G.H.Q. of the request, he received instructions that he was not to take part. The Field-Marshal was anxious to withdraw his exhausted troops as soon as possible to some safe locality for eight or ten days, where they might rest and be re-equipped, and he accordingly arranged with General Joffre that they should fall back to a line a little to the south of the Aisne between Soissons and Compiègne. The situation was complicated by the fact that von Kluck's sweep westwards had compelled the evacuation of the British advanced base at Amiens. It was on this day that St. Nazaire, at the mouth of the Loire, was first suggested to take the place of Havre as the principal sea base of the British force in France. 27-28 Aug. 1914.

It may be mentioned here that, with the view of creating a diversion on the western flank to assist the British Expeditionary Force and of supporting the Belgians, three battalions of Royal Marine Light Infantry, under command of Brigadier-General Sir George Aston, were landed at Ostend on the 27th and 28th August. They were re-embarked on the 31st.[1] News of this landing appears to have reached the German Supreme Command on the 30th. With regard to it the head of the Operations Branch of the German General Staff has written: [2] Map 2.

"At this time there was, as may be imagined, no lack "of alarming reports at General Headquarters. Ostend "and Antwerp took a prominent part in them. One day "countless British troops were said to have landed at Ostend "and to be marching on Antwerp; on another that there "were about to be great sorties from Antwerp. Even "landings of Russian troops, 80,000 men, at Ostend were "mentioned. At Ostend a great entrenched camp for the "English was in preparation.[3] . . . Though, of course, "the security of the rear and right flank of the army re-"quired constant attention, such, and even worse informa-"tion, could not stop the advance of the troops."

[1] For details see Sir Julian Corbett's "Naval Operations," vol. i. pp. 92-4 and 123-4.

[2] General-Leutnant Tappen, "Bis zur Marne," p. 22.

[3] Brigadier-General Aston's men did commence digging.

## Movements of the German *First* and *Second Armies* after Le Cateau

27 Aug. 1914.

What became of the German *First* and *Second Armies* after the battle of Le Cateau will now be related.

Sketch 5. Map 3.

On the 26th August, von Bülow[1] had issued orders for the continuation of the pursuit in a "sharp south-"westerly direction . . . as sufficient elbow room had to "be obtained for the great wheel of the *Third*, *Fourth* and "*Fifth Armies* round Verdun." "After continuous fighting with French rear guards," the *I. Cavalry Corps* and three and a half corps of the *Second Army*[2] reached an approximate S.E. and N.W. line a little in front of Avesnes, the cavalry and *X. Reserve Corps* moving to Marbaix, where they had the fight, already related,[3] with the Connaught Rangers; but the *Second Army* took no part in the battle of Le Cateau.

On the 27th, after Le Cateau, von Kluck, making a late start, moved about twelve miles in a south-westerly direction:—*III. Corps* via Maretz to Nauroy, *IV. Corps* to Bellicourt—Vendhuille, *II. Corps*, with *II. Cavalry Corps* in front, to Sailly Saillisel—Fins (5 miles south-east of Bapaume); and the *IV. Reserve Corps* followed between the *II.* and *IV. Corps* to Roisel—Liéramont. The only fighting that von Kluck records is isolated encounters of the *II. Corps* and cavalry with General d'Amade's forces on the British left, at Heudecourt and westwards. The *IX. Corps* (less the *17th Division*) marched from Maubeuge via Le Cateau some five hours later than the rest of the Army, and billeted in and about Busigny.

The *Second Army* (still without the *13th Division*), reached a S.E. and N.W. line through Étreux, where the *X. Reserve Corps*, on its western flank, ran into the Munster Fusiliers.[4]

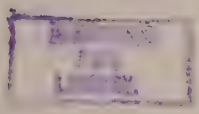
During the day, von Kluck was released from von Bülow's command; he was therefore free to make a wide turning movement to the west, instead of being

[1] Bülow, p. 29.

[2] The *13th Division* was left behind at Maubeuge, where General von Zwehl took charge of the investment with the *VII. Reserve Corps* (less *13th Reserve Division* on march from Namur), and the *17th Division* of the *IX. Corps*. The *13th Division* rejoined the *Second Army* in the nick of time to take part in the battle of Guise.

[3] See p. 205.

[4] See p. 209 *et seq.*



# THE GERMAN ADVANCE, 17 AUGUST - 5 SEPTEMBER, 1914.

tied to the *Second Army* in order to assist it to tactical successes. 28 Aug. 1914.

On the 28th, therefore, the *First Army* sent on cavalry and field batteries in pursuit of d'Amade's forces, and there was rear-guard fighting; the remainder of the Army moved south-west across the British front. The *III. Corps* got no further than Bellenglise—outskirts of St. Quentin, owing to the opposition met with from French Territorials, British cavalry and stragglers; the heads of the three corps on the right just reached the Somme, on a front six miles on either side of Péronne; the *IX. Corps* was still a march behind on the left.

In the *Second Army*, von Bülow ordered the *Guard* and *X. Corps* on his left (east) to stand fast and reconnoitre, since the French Fifth Army was on their front behind the Oise, whilst his right swung round in touch with the *First Army*:—

"*I. Cavalry Corps*," he ordered, "will endeavour to "attack the British in the rear, moving round the south "of St. Quentin;"

the *VII. Corps* (less *13th Division*) was to march early to St. Quentin; the *X. Reserve Corps* was to make a short march of about six miles south-west from Étreux. Except for the cavalry fight at La Guinguette [1] and the right of the *X. Reserve Corps* brushing against the rear guard at Mont d'Origny,[2] all touch with the British was lost. Von Bülow does not say what places the above-named corps reached by evening, but he records that in the afternoon of the 28th he received a message from von Kluck asking him to deal with the disorganized English forces, who appeared to be falling back on La Fère. He therefore ordered the *X. Reserve* and *VII. Corps* (less *13th Division*) to push on westwards, towards the passages of the Somme and the Crozat Canal near Ham and St. Simon (4 miles east of Ham), which they reached on the 29th.

Thus the B.E.F., though at first followed by the right of the *Second Army* and the left of the *First*, escaped from pressure on the 28th owing to the gap between these Armies steadily increasing to some fourteen miles.

During the evening of the 28th an officer from O.H.L. brought to von Bülow and von Kluck "General Directions for the Further Conduct of Operations." [3]

[1] See p. 215. [2] See p. 213.

[3] Given *in extenso* in von Kluck. Thus far the original plan for the *First Army* to sweep west of Paris was maintained.

In accordance with these, the *First Army* and *II. Cavalry Corps* were to march west of the Oise towards the lower Seine, and the *Second Army* and *I. Cavalry Corps* towards Paris ; at the same time, the *First Army* was to be " prepared to co-operate in the fighting of the *Second* " *Army* and be responsible for the protection of the right " flank." As the Armies were already marching south-west, these directions did not necessarily mean any change in the orders to their corps.

A completely erroneous appreciation of the situation appears to have been current at O.H.L. at this time. It furnishes a clue to the apparently haphazard way in which the German Armies moved, and is so extraordinary that it is best, perhaps, to quote the words of the Chief of the Operations Section : [1]

" The French, as expected, had offered battle to prevent " us from penetrating into France. The highly favourable " reports that came in daily, even on the 25th August, in " conjunction with the great victory of the *Sixth* and " *Seventh Armies* in Lorraine on the 20th and 25th, " aroused in Great Headquarters the belief that the great " decisive battle in the West had been fought and con- " cluded in our favour. Under the impression that there " had been a ' decisive victory,' the Chief of the General " Staff resolved on the 25th, in spite of arguments to the " contrary, to detach forces to the East. He believed the " moment had come when, in conformity with the great " operations plan, a decisive victory in the West having " been won, considerable forces could be sent to the East " to obtain a decision there also. For this purpose six " corps were detailed, among them the *XI. Corps* and " *Guard Reserve Corps* (besieging Namur). . . . Only after " the whole extent of the victory at Tannenberg became " known was the order cancelled as regards the four corps " to be taken from the centre and left ; one of these, the " *V. Corps* of the *Fifth Army*, was actually awaiting " entrainment at Thionville. On the subsequent days " further reports of successes came in. After O.H.L. had " issued instructions on the 26th and 27th for the continua- " tion of the operations on the basis that great victories " had been gained, the *First Army* reported on the 28th " August that it had defeated the British Army, and that " it was already half-way between the Belgian frontier and " Paris. . . . The idea that the French retirement was

[1] Tappen, pp. 18, 19.

" according to plan was only expressed by a few solitary " individuals." 28 Aug. 1914.

This statement may be partly designed to throw some of the blame on the Army commanders for forwarding misleading reports of victories, but the despatch of the two army corps to Russia and the bringing of the *V. Corps* out of the line are established facts. Nor would it seem that the successes were unexpected. Shortly before the war Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Chief of the Staff of the Austro-Hungarian Army, enquired of von Moltke how long it would be before a decision in the West would be reached, and the latter replied: " the thirty-sixth to fortieth day of mobilization;"[1] as the 2nd August 1914 was the first day, this meant the 6th to 10th September, a very accurate forecast.

## NOTES

### I. Movements of the French Fifth Army[2] from Charleroi to Guise

The general line of retirement of the French Fifth Army after Charleroi was south-westwards, its orders being to reach the line Laon—La Fère. The movements of General Valabrègue's two Reserve divisions in contact with the British I. Corps have been mentioned. The XVIII. Corps (35th, 26th and 38th (African) Divisions) on their right, retired via Avesnes, and crossed the Oise at Romery (4 miles east of Guise). The III. Corps, next on the right (5th, 6th and 37th (African) Divisions), followed in echelon behind the XVIII.; it passed the French frontier on the 25th and marched through Fourmies (10 miles south-east of Avesnes), and crossed the Oise between Etreaupont and Ohis. The X. Corps marched via La Capelle to Hirson, first south and then south-east, to keep in touch with the Fourth Army, and thence to Vervins. The I. Corps, from the right of the Army, after reaching Travaux (7 miles south of Vervins), was brought north-west into second line between the III. and X. Corps. Map 3.

Thus, by the evening of the 28th August, the Fifth Army was drawn up facing north and north-west behind the Oise from Vervins practically to La Fère, in the following order: 4th Cavalry Division, 51st Reserve Division, X. Corps, III. Corps, XVIII. Corps, Valabrègue's Reserve divisions, with the I. Corps coming up into second line. The German *Second Army* was in contact with the whole front of the Fifth Army, and had secured a bridgehead at Guise.

[1] Conrad's "Aus meiner Dienstzeit," vol. i. p. 370.

[2] From Palat, vol. v., and Hanotaux in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," 1st September 1918.

II. British Losses 23rd to 27th August 1914
(Excluding Missing who returned to their Units)

| | 23rd. | 24th. (Mons.) | 25th. | 26th. (Le Cateau.) | 27th. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cavalry Division . . | 6 | 252 | 123 | 15 | 14 |
| I. Corps : | | | | | |
| 1st Division . . | 9 | 42 | 32 | 61 | 826 |
| 2nd Division . . | 35 | 59 | 230 | 344 | 48 |
| II. Corps : | | | | | |
| 3rd Division . . | 1,185 | 557 | 357 | 1,796 | 50 |
| 5th Division . . | 386 | 1,656 | 62 | 2,366 | 76 |
| 4th Division . . | .. | .. | 65 | 3,158 | 58 |
| 19th Infantry Brigade | 17 | 40 | 36 | 477 | 108 |
| | 1,638 | 2,606 | 905 | 8,217[1] | 1,180 |

[1] The British losses at Waterloo were 8,458 (Wellington Despatches, vol. xii.).

# CHAPTER XI

## 29TH-31ST AUGUST: THE EVENTS OF THE RETREAT CONTINUED

(See Sketches 4 & 5; Maps 3, 4, 14, 15 & 16)

### 29TH AUGUST

EXCEPT for some minor adjustments to secure the best ground possible, in the course of which the 4th Division had moved back a little to the area Bussy—Sermaize—Chevilly, the morning of the 29th August found the British Expeditionary Force halted in its over-night positions on the Oise.[1] To the right front of the British was the French Fifth Army, and to their left front the newly-formed French Sixth Army, General Maunoury's headquarters being at Montdidier.[2] In pursuance of General Joffre's directions, the Fifth Army attacked towards St. Quentin. But the situation had changed since the operation had been planned; the advanced troops of the German *Guard* and *X. Corps*, driving back Valabrègue's Reserve divisions which opposed them, had crossed the Oise on the evening of the 28th. As they were rapidly reinforced, it became necessary to stop the French main attack, which was going well, and deal with this menace to what was now the right flank of the Fifth Army. The counter-offensive drove the Germans back over the Oise, but on the left in the original direction towards St. Quentin, no advantage was gained; the opposing force:

Sketches 4 & 5. Maps 3 & 14.

[1] See p. 217.

[2] At this time, General Maunoury's Army consisted of the VII. Corps (14th Division and 63rd Reserve Division), 55th Reserve Division (just arrived from the Army of Lorraine), the 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions (of d'Amade's force), a Moroccan infantry brigade, two battalions of Chasseurs des Alpes and a Provisional Cavalry Division (General Cornulier-Lucinière's) formed from Sordet's Cavalry Corps, the rest of this corps having gone back to Versailles to refit. The 56th Reserve Division arrived during the evening of the 29th August.

the *X. Reserve Corps* and the greater part of the *VII. Corps*[1] of the *Second Army* and the *17th Division* from the inner wing of the *First Army*,[2] being in superior numbers. Meanwhile the outer wing of the German *First Army*, swinging south-westwards, was engaged with General Maunoury's Army, and there was heavy fighting at Proyart (10 miles south-west of Péronne) and Rosières (6 miles south of Proyart).

For the British, except the cavalry, much of the 29th was a day of rest, devoted to repairing the wear and tear of the strenuous days through which they had passed.

The enemy was by no means wholly inactive on the British front. At 5 A.M. the 16th Lancers were driven out of Jussy on the Crozat Canal by infantry and machine guns,[3] but they held their own until the bridge over the canal had been destroyed, when they and the rest of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade fell back slowly to Chauny (6½ miles W.S.W. of La Fère). Before 8 A.M. reports came in that German infantry and guns were crossing the Somme at Pargny and Béthencourt well away to the north;[4] and soon after that hour the 2nd Cavalry Brigade lying north of Smith-Dorrien was engaged with a force of all arms[5] advancing from the direction of Ham. The brigade retired with deliberation to Guiscard, which it reached at 11 A.M., and thence went southward. To support it, the 9th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Division took position at Crissoles (3 miles north of Noyon), and the 4th Division sent a battalion to Muirancourt (2 miles north of Crissolles). By 1 P.M. it was apparent that nothing serious was going forward, the general trend of von Kluck's Army was still decidedly to the west of south, and von Bülow was engaged with the French. At 4.15 P.M., in accordance with G.H.Q. instructions, General Smith-Dorrien issued orders for a short withdrawal of his force, to bring all of it south of the Oise and nearer to the I. Corps. At 6 P.M. the
Map 14. troops began their march:—the 3rd Division to Cuts, the 5th to Carlepont, and the 4th to the north of Carlepont, leaving a rear guard of the 11th Infantry Brigade north of

[1] One infantry brigade and an artillery *Abteilung* (three batteries) were still before Maubeuge.

[2] Just relieved from the investment of Maubeuge.

[3] Possibly *Jäger*, of the *I. Cavalry Corps*.

[4] The *18th Division* according to von Kluck's map.

[5] This according to Vogel was part of the *Guard Cavalry Division*; the *I. Cavalry Corps* was filling the gap between the *First* and *Second Armies*.

the Oise. All three divisions reached their destinations between 9 P.M. and midnight. The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades followed them; and thus by midnight practically the whole of General Smith-Dorrien's force had crossed to the south of the Oise. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade, on its right front, billeted for the night at Chauny, and the 4th Cavalry Brigade five miles west of Noyon, at Dives. This south-eastward movement of the II. Corps reduced the gap between it and the I. Corps to seven miles. 29 Aug. 1914.

Throughout this day the I. Corps enjoyed undisturbed repose. During the afternoon General Joffre visited Sir John French at Compiègne, whither G.H.Q. had moved from Noyon on the 28th. In view of the general situation, he was most anxious that the B.E.F. should remain in line with the French Armies on either flank, so that he could hold the Rheims—Amiens line, which passed through La Fère, and attack from it.[1]

Sir John French, however, in view of the exertions of the British Army, and its losses in officers and men, and even more in material, was equally anxious to withdraw and rest it for a few days, in order to make good defects. He did not consider that it was in condition to attack; but it was not until 9 P.M.,[2] after the success of the Germans on the left of the French Fifth Army was evident, that he issued orders for further retreat to the line Soissons—Compiègne, behind the Aisne. Sketch 5. Maps 3 & 14.

The German situation at that time was roughly as follows: The *Second* and *First Armies* formed a gigantic wedge, of which the apex lay a little south of Ham: the *Second Army*, under von Bülow, extending from Etreaupont on the Oise nearly to Ham, with its front towards south and south-east; and the *First Army*, under von Kluck, from Ham to Albert, with its front to the south-west. Both of these Armies were already weaker than the German Higher Command had originally intended. The *First Army* had been obliged to leave the *III. Reserve* and *IX. Reserve Corps* to invest Antwerp; and upon this day the *Guard Reserve Corps* of the *Second Army*, as well as the *XI. Corps* of the *Third Army* (relieved by the fall of Namur), after marching back to Aix la Chapelle, began to move by rail to the Russian front. Further, the *Second Army* had to leave the *VII. Reserve Corps* and part of the *VII. Corps* to invest Maubeuge.

Without the B.E.F. to fill the gap between his Fifth

[1] See p. 218. [2] Appendix 19.

and Sixth Armies, even if their initial operations were successful, General Joffre felt that he could not, in view of the general situation, risk fighting on the Rheims—Amiens line.[1] His orders for the retirement of the Fifth Army were issued during the night of the 29th/30th, and began to take effect about 8.30 A.M. on the 30th, when, after a very successful counter-stroke, the French I. and X. Corps began to withdraw. His message to Sir John French, sent off at 8.45 A.M., said that he had given General Lanrezac orders to place his Army behind the Serre (which flows into the Oise at La Fère). The intention was to make a general retirement, avoiding any decisive action, but without giving up ground unnecessarily, and he pointed out that it was of the highest interest that the B.E.F. should keep in constant liaison with the Fifth Army, " so " as to profit by favourable opportunities and administer " to the enemy other severe lessons of the kind that he had " received on the previous day."

## The 30th August

Sketches 4 & 5. Maps 3, 4 & 15.

Sir John French had left the time of starting to be settled by his corps commanders; the I. Corps began its march southwards at 3 A.M., covered on the eastern flank by the 5th Cavalry Brigade, and on the western by the 3rd. The day was intensely hot, and in the Forest of St. Gobain the air was stifling. Since crossing the Somme, the British had passed into a rugged country of deep woodlands, steep hills, narrow valleys and dusty roads. Severe gradients and crowds of refugees multiplied checks on the way; and, what made the march more distressing, the I. Corps was ordered—in consequence of a false alarm of a German force moving from Noyon towards the south of Laon—to turn north-east, so as to cover the left flank of the Fifth Army. Such was the exhaustion of the men that it was necessary to curtail the march, and the 1st Division was halted for the night some eight miles north of Soissons, with its head at Allemant; and the 2nd Division a little to the south-west of it about Pasly. The II. Corps, together with the 4th Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade—the two latter from this day constituted

[1] Hanotaux, vol. viii. p. 134, gives as the reason for the further retreat that the Fifth Army was " uncovered on the left by the precipitate " retirement of the British and on the right by the withdrawal of the " Fourth Army from which it was separated by a gap of 20 miles watched " by only a few squadrons."

the III. Corps under General Pulteney—after a few hours' rest on conclusion of its night march,[1] continued its movement south-east, and halted on the Aisne about Attichy, the 11th Infantry Brigade having been skilfully withdrawn without mishap by Brigadier-General Hunter-Weston from its rear-guard position beyond the Oise. The 5th and 3rd Cavalry Brigades lay for the night at Vauxaillon, between the 1st and 2nd Divisions, and at Fontenoy on the Aisne, between the I. and II. Corps, respectively; the 1st, 2nd and 4th Cavalry Brigades were reunited under the hand of the divisional commander, on the left of the Army, round Compiègne. The gap between the two wings of the B.E.F. was thus reduced to six miles. 30 Aug. 1914.

There was practically no interference from the enemy on this day. The rear guard of the Cavalry Division was slightly engaged by Uhlans at 8 A.M., and two parties of Engineers were fired on whilst engaged in destroying the bridges over the Oise, with the result that the bridge at Bailly was left undemolished.[2]

General Lanrezac had little difficulty in carrying out his retirement, though the Germans, apparently emboldened by news from their aviators that the French were withdrawing, looked for a time as if they meant to continue the attack, particularly on his left wing; but by noon the movement was well under way, and the Germans seemed content to let him go.[3]

General Maunoury's Army had also received orders to retire, and had fallen back, after sharp fighting, from the Avre south-westward to a line from Estrées St. Denis (where his right was within five miles of the British at Compiègne) to Quiry. Von Kluck had shown signs of a change of direction, for his left or inner wing had wheeled nearly due south, though his right was still, for the present, moving south-west upon Amiens. This seemed to indicate, though as yet the movement was too imperfectly developed to make it certain, that von Kluck either considered Maunoury's force to be for the moment powerless for any offensive action, or that he considered himself to have gained the position that he desired for the envelopment of

[1] See p. 227.

[2] A second attempt was made to destroy this bridge after dark; but Major Barstow and the men of his party were killed by a volley at about fifteen yards' range, fired, according to Vogel, by the cyclists of the *Guard Jäger*.

[3] The *Second Army* was given a rest day on the 31st (Bülow, p. 44, Kluck, p. 76).

the western flank of the Allied Army. The British Army he reckoned, as the German official bulletins testify, to have been thoroughly beaten on the 26th and following days; and, as from a captured letter he heard of Sir John French's anxiety to give it rest,[1] his appreciation in this respect was less faulty than it may since have seemed. If Maunoury's force could also be dismissed as negligible, there was nothing to hinder von Kluck from wheeling south-east against the open left flank of the French Fifth Army, annihilating it in conjunction with von Bülow, and then rolling up the French line from west to east.[2]

General Joffre, for his part, on realizing that his counter-stroke at Guise had not wholly fulfilled his hopes, and as the British Commander-in-Chief had expressed his inability on the 29th to take the offensive, came to the conclusion that he must yield yet further ground before he could hope to deliver another and decisive one. He therefore ordered General Maunoury to fall back to the line from Senlis, through Creil and Clermont, to Beauvais (35 miles west of Compiègne), and requested Sir John French to continue to fill the gap between General Lanrezac and General Maunoury. The Field-Marshal agreed, and at 5.15 P.M. issued orders [3] for his army to move south-west, the I. Corps and 5th Cavalry Brigade to the area about Villers Cottérêts; the II. Corps, on the west of the I. Corps, to the area Feigneux—Béthisy St. Martin—Crépy en Valois; the III. Corps further to the north-west, to the area St. Sauveur—Verberie, and the Cavalry Division, most westerly of all, to the line of the Oise beyond Verberie. General Allenby was subsequently informed that, as the French had closed in on the left, he could use the area between the III. Corps and the river.

## The 31st August

Sketch 4. Maps 3, 4 & 16.

On the 31st, accordingly, the British resumed their march under the same trying conditions of dust, heat and thirst as on the previous day. The I. Corps opened the operations with the passage of the Aisne in two columns, at Soissons and just west of it. The transport was often in difficulties, owing to the steep gradients of

[1] Kluck, p. 81.
[2] Bülow had called upon Kluck for this very purpose. See p. 233.
[3] Appendix 20.

the roads to the south of the river, and the scarcity of water everywhere was a great trial both to men and horses. Once again the infantry was wholly untroubled by the enemy—the men of the 6th Infantry Brigade actually had time for a bathe in the Aisne—, and the cavalry rear guards, which covered the march, were never really pressed. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade had to keep some Uhlans at a distance when crossing the Aisne 6 miles west of Soissons at Fontenoy; and heads of German columns were reported at Noyon and south of it on the road to Compiègne.[1] In this quarter, west of the Oise, the 3rd Hussars (4th Cavalry Brigade) were in touch with hostile patrols from daybreak onward, the enemy's force gradually increasing until it drew the whole regiment into action. The fight was, however, broken off without difficulty, and at noon, the 3rd Hussars retired, having suffered trifling loss and killed a good many troopers of the German *3rd Hussars*—the divisional cavalry of the German *III. Corps*—which, by a curious coincidence, were opposed to them. 31 Aug. 1914.

The heat of the day, the difficulty of the country and the exhaustion of the troops, however, compelled the greater part of the Army to stop short of their intended destinations. The I. Corps halted for the night on the northern, instead of on the western side, of the Forest of Villers Cottérêts, midway between it and the river Aisne: 1st Division around Missy, 2nd Division around Laversine. The left of the French Fifth Army was near Vauxaillon, 12 miles to the north. Map 16.

The II. Corps halted at Coyolles, south-west of Villers Cottérêts, and at Crépy en Valois: 5th Division on the east, 3rd Division on the west.

The III. Corps, after a flank march through the Forest of Compiègne, reached its allotted area, at the south-western corner of the forest about Verberie, but at a late hour, some units not taking up their billets before 10.15 P.M. It was separated by a gap of some five miles from the nearest troops of the II. Corps at Crépy, but in touch with the French on its left through part of the Cavalry Division.

The 5th and 3rd Cavalry Brigades halted in the same area as the I. Corps. Of the other brigades, the 4th was

[1] The German *III. Corps* crossed the Oise in two columns at Noyon and Ribécourt, and v. d. Marwitz's cavalry crossed near Compiègne (see Kluck's map).

with the III. Corps at Verberie, and the 2nd west of it at Chevrières, in touch with the French Sixth Army, which, on this evening, reached the Chevrières—Beauvais line. The 1st Cavalry Brigade and L Battery R.H.A. on the western flank of the Army had moved out soon after dawn on the 31st from Compiègne on the road towards Amiens, and had remained halted for a considerable time, on the watch for German troops advancing in that quarter. Seeing no sign of any, the brigade, after a wide sweep westward, recrossed the Oise to Verberie, and made its way to Néry, there to form a link—though it could not fill up the gap—between the II. and III. Corps. It did not reach its destination until dusk, and L Battery did not join it until half an hour later.

Aerial reconnaissance upon this day confirmed the fact that von Kluck had reached the limit of his western advance, and was wheeling south-eastward, covering his southern flank with his cavalry.[1] At least two cavalry divisions were known to have reached the Oise during the afternoon of the 31st; and it appeared that three actually crossed the river between Noyon and Compiègne, two of which were reported to be moving east upon Vauxaillon, while the third was passing through Bailly (8 miles north-east of Compiègne) at 2.30 P.M.[2] The capture of a trooper of the German *8th Hussars*, by the 2/Royal Welch Fusiliers after a brush with a German patrol towards dusk to the north-west of Verberie, seemed to indicate the presence of the German *4th Cavalry Division* in this quarter. A heavy German column, reckoned to be ten thousand strong, was also reported to have reached Gournay (about eight miles north-west of Compiègne) at 3 P.M., and to be moving south.[3] A captured order issued to the *8th Division* of the German *IV. Corps* from Beaucourt (14 miles south-east of Amiens) at 6.45 A.M. on the 31st, revealed the project which was in von Kluck's mind at the time. The order gives the information that the French troops (Maunoury's) on the Avre had been defeated

[1] For the German movements see next page.

[2] According to von Kluck, on the 31st von der Marwitz's three cavalry divisions (*2nd*, *4th* and *9th*) crossed the Oise at Thourotte, and thence marched through the Forest of Laigle to Attichy on the Aisne, but "Deutsche Kavallerie" (p. 76 and map) puts them at night about six miles south of Compiègne. Von Richthofen's two divisions (*Guard* and *5th*) reached Noyon on the 30th, and moved on the 31st across the British front via Bailly and Ribécourt to Vauxaillon and Soissons. This latter statement is confirmed by Vogel.

[3] This would appear to be the *5th Division* of the *III. Corps*.

on the 29th and had withdrawn; that the British were retreating south-eastward (*sic*); that von Bülow had defeated at Guise the French Fifth Army, large bodies of which were retiring through La Fère; and sets forth that the task of the German *First Army* is to cut off its retreat. "Again, therefore, we must call upon the troops for forced marches."[1] However, at the moment, the one thing clear to Sir John French was that the German *First Army*, which had practically left the British Army alone since the 26th, was again closing in upon it in great force, and that he must avoid serious collision with it until the time for General Joffre's counter-stroke should be ripe. He therefore issued his orders[2] for the retreat to be continued on the morrow. 29-31 Aug. 1914.

## Movements of the German *First* and *Second Armies*. 29th to 31st August

The movements of the German right wing on the 30th and 31st August had a decisive effect on the campaign. Instead of pursuing his march towards the lower Seine, as ordered by O.H.L. on the 28th, and making a wide sweep which would have caught in it General Maunoury's Army and the B.E.F., von Kluck wheeled his Army south-eastwards towards the Oise, in response to von Bülow's request that he should help him to exploit the supposed success in the battle of Guise and finish off the French Fifth Army. The messages are of interest. Sketch 5. Maps 14, 15 & 16.

Von Kluck says: "At 5.55 P.M. on 30th a wireless "message was received from *Second Army* Headquarters: "'Enemy decisively beaten to-day; strong forces re-"'tiring on La Fère. The British, who were barring the "'Oise south-west of La Fère, are also retreating, some in "'a southerly, some in a south-easterly direction.' It was "followed by a second message at 6.30 P.M. 'To gain "'the full advantages of the victory a wheel inwards of "'the *First Army*, pivoted on Chauny, towards the line "'La Fère—Laon is highly desirable.'"

Von Bülow does not give these messages, but says that on the 29th, "The *First Army* was asked by wireless to "support the *Second Army* on the 30th, and at 7.5 P.M.

[1] Hauptmann Bloem relates further that the three battalion commanders of his regiment made a protest to the regimental commander with regard to the excessive marching and were met by the brief reply "Sweat saves blood."

[2] Appendix 21.

"on the 30th the following information was received from "the *First Army*: 'Right wing of *First Army* has thrown "'the enemy over the Avre. Will advance to-morrow "'against the Oise section Compiègne—Chauny.'" Von Kluck likewise does not give this message, but admits that "during the evening of the 30th August O.H.L. was "informed that the *First Army* had wheeled round to- "wards the Oise and would advance on the 31st by "Compiègne and Noyon to exploit the success of the "*Second Army*."

The German Supreme Command concurred in the proposed move, replying when it was reported:—"The "movement begun by the *First Army* is in accordance with "the wishes of O.H.L." Fortunately von Kluck had wasted time by his thrust in the air westwards after Le Cateau and his assistance to von Bülow came too late.

The leading corps of the German *First Army*, the *IX.* and *III.*, managed to cross the Oise between Chauny and Bailly on the 31st and reached the line Vezaponin—Vic—Attichy, 12 miles beyond, with the *II. Cavalry Corps* on their right front; the *IV.* and *II.* swung round behind them to the line Mareuil—Tricot—Maignelay, west and abreast of Noyon, with the *IV. Reserve* still further in rear, in and south of Amiens. Thus, on that day, German corps were moving south-eastwards north of the Aisne, whilst the B.E.F. was marching more or less south-westwards on the other side of that river. Von Kluck, therefore, thinking by "extraordinary forced marches" to outflank the Allies,[1] was actually advancing into the net that Joffre had in preparation for him.[2]

[1] Kuhl's "Marne," p. 104.

[2] The following description of von Kluck at Lassigny (12 miles north of Compiègne) on the 30th August 1914, by M. Albert Fabre, Conseiller à la Cour d'appel de Paris (given in M. Hanotaux's "Histoire illustrée de la Guerre de 1914," Tome 8, p. 158), seems worthy of quotation. The general had déjeuner at M. Fabre's villa and gave him a "safeguard" for the house signed by his own hand:

"Bientôt, un mouvement se produisit parmi les officiers qui se rangèrent "devant la porte de la propriété. Une automobile s'arrêta. Un officier "d'allure impressionnante et arrogante en descendit. Il s'avança seul "jusqu'au milieu du terre-plein de la villa. Il était grand, majestueux, il "avait le visage rasé et ravagé, les traits durs, le regard effrayant. Il tenait, "à la main droite, un fusil de soldat; sa main gauche était appuyée sur la "crosse d'un revolver d'ordonnance. Il fit plusieurs tours sur lui-même "en frappant le sol de la crosse de son fusil et s'arrêta dans une pose "théâtrale. Personne ne semblait oser l'approcher. Le personnage avait "l'air véritablement terrible. J'eus la vision d'Attila. C'était le trop "fameux von Kluck."

The German *Second Army* rested on the 31st after its battle at Guise on the previous two days, as already related.[1] 31 Aug. 1914.

[1] Hauptmann Brinckmann of the *Second Army* staff came over and reported to the *First Army*, that the *Second Army* " was exhausted by the battle of Guise and unable to pursue " (Kuhl's " Marne," p. 109). Bülow says : " On the 31st the troops of the *Second Army* were placed in positions of readiness for the attack on La Fère " (p. 44).

# CHAPTER XII

## THE RETREAT CONTINUED. COLLISION WITH THE ENEMY. NÉRY, CRÉPY EN VALOIS AND VILLERS COTTÉRÊTS. 1ST SEPTEMBER 1914

(See Sketches 4 & 5 ; Maps 4, 17, 18)

### THE AFFAIR OF NÉRY

Sketch 4. Maps 4 & 17.

G.H.Q. operation orders [1] sent out at 8.50 P.M. on the 31st August from Dammartin en Goele gave the information that the enemy appeared to have completed his westerly movement and to be wheeling to the south, and that large columns were advancing in a general south or south-easterly direction on Noyon—Compiègne, covered by at least two cavalry divisions which had reached the Oise that afternoon. The following movements towards the south-west, marches of some ten to fourteen miles, if all divisions reached their destinations on the 31st, were ordered to be carried out next day :—

The I. Corps to move to the area La Ferté Milon—Betz ; the II. Corps to Betz—Nanteuil ; the III. Corps to Nanteuil—Baron ; and the Cavalry Division to Baron —Mont l'Évêque. Special instructions were given that the rear guard of the III. Corps was to reach a line drawn east and west through Néry by 6 A.M. ; but, owing to the lateness of the hour at which many units arrived at their billets, General Pulteney was obliged to represent that this was impossible. In obedience to the spirit of the order, however, he reported that the transport of his corps would move off at 1 A.M.

The night passed quietly, with rather less than the usual disturbances and alarms, and there was no indication that there would be contact with the enemy next day. Several small actions, however, did take place on the 1st September. They might be dismissed in a few words,

[1] Appendix 21.

were it not that they show that the British were more than able to hold their own when fortune brought them to grips with the enemy. 1 Sept. 1914.

Dawn broke with dense mist, presaging another day of excessive heat. The 1st Cavalry Brigade and L Battery at Néry had been ordered to be ready to resume their march at 4.30 A.M., but, since it was impossible to see anything two hundred yards away, this was countermanded, and they were directed to stand fast until 5 A.M. The men were busy preparing their breakfasts and watering their horses when, at 5.30 A.M., the mist being as thick as ever, a patrol of the 11th Hussars returned with the report that it had ridden into a body of German cavalry in the fog, and had been hunted back to Néry. Immediately afterwards high-explosive shells burst over the village, and there was a roar of guns, machine guns and rifle fire from the heights, little more than six hundred yards distant, that overlook the eastern side of the village. The horses of the Bays took fright and galloped down the road to the north. The battery was in mass, with the horses hooked in and poles down; men and horses began to fall at once under German fire, and the battery commander was knocked over and temporarily disabled whilst hurrying back from brigade headquarters. In his absence, Captain Bradbury, with the help of the other officers and of such men as were not busy with the horses, unlimbered three guns and man-handled them round so as to reply to the German batteries which were taking him in flank. One gun was almost instantly put out of action by a direct hit. The other two opened fire, but had hardly done so before the gun under Lieut. Giffard was silenced, he and every man of his detachment being killed or wounded.

The remaining two subalterns now joined Captain Bradbury at the third gun, and immediately afterwards Lieut. Campbell was killed, but the one gun remained in action against the German twelve with good effect. In vain the enemy concentrated his fire on it; he could not silence it. Meantime, the three cavalry regiments had manned the eastern face of the village, secured the northern and southern exits and opened fire, particularly with their machine guns. The German cavalrymen pushed their way dismounted to within five hundred yards of the village, but no nearer. Towards 6 A.M. Brigadier-General Briggs, after strengthening his own right, ordered two squadrons

of the 5th Dragoon Guards, his last remaining reserve, to attack the enemy's right flank. They accordingly galloped northwards and then wheeling to the east, dismounted and pushed in to close range. Whilst the 1st Cavalry Brigade was thus holding the German *4th Cavalry Division*, in response to General Briggs' call for assistance, just as the mist began to thin in the morning sun, the 4th Cavalry Brigade and I Battery came on the scene from St. Vaast on the north-west, followed by a composite battalion of the Warwickshire and Dublins of the 10th Infantry Brigade from Verberie from the same direction, and the 1/Middlesex from Saintines in the north. Four guns of I Battery unlimbered two thousand yards south-west of the German position. As it did so, the fire of L Battery ceased; and for good reason. For some time its fire had been desultory. Lieut. Munday had been several times wounded, and man after man was struck down until there only remained Captain Bradbury, who was still untouched, and Sergt. Nelson, who had been wounded. Battery-Sergeant-Major Dorrell then joined them, and immediately Captain Bradbury, whilst fetching ammunition from a wagon twenty yards off, fell mortally wounded. The survivors continued to fire until the last round was expended, and then—but not till then—L Battery was silent.

I Battery opened fire about 8 A.M. and speedily silenced the German artillery, and the enemy began to draw off. He made an attempt to save his guns, but the teams were caught by I Battery, and the men trying to man-handle the guns back were shot down by machine-gun fire; nevertheless, four out of the twelve were carried off, only, as will be seen, to fall into British hands next day. The 1/Middlesex under Major Rowley followed by a squadron of the 11th Hussars charged into the batteries, to find that there was not a live German left near them. The Hussars thereupon pressed on in pursuit for a mile until they were recalled, capturing seventy-eight prisoners belonging to every regiment of the *4th Cavalry Division*. By 8.45 A.M. the action was over.

There can be no doubt that the 1st Cavalry Brigade was taken by surprise; but it is not less certain that the German *4th Cavalry Division* was equally unaware of the near presence of a British force. Indeed, in an intercepted German wireless message, it was reported that the division had been surprised in its bivouac at Néry and surrounded

by considerable hostile forces.[1] Captain Bradbury died very shortly after he was hit, and never received the Victoria Cross which was awarded to him, to his gallant companion, Sergeant Nelson, and to Battery-Sergeant-Major Dorrell. The casualties of the 1st Cavalry Brigade did not exceed one hundred and thirty-five officers and men killed and wounded; and of these five officers and forty-nine men belonged to L Battery. Among the killed was Colonel Ansell of the 5th Dragoon Guards, who had already distinguished himself at Élouges. The German casualties are unknown. They can hardly have been fewer, and were probably more numerous, than the British. 1 Sept. 1914.

This was the first encounter with the enemy on the 1st September.[2]

[1] For German movements see p. 246.

[2] A German account of Néry by an officer of the *18th Dragoon Regiment* (of the *4th Cavalry Division*) has appeared in "Mecklenburgs Söhne im Weltkriege," Heft 13. He states that the three divisions of von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* were sent forward at 4 A.M. on the 31st to reconnoitre towards Paris, and that his division marched without any halt worth mentioning; this agrees with the statements of prisoners, who said that they had made a forced march of 26 hours to get to Néry. At dawn the advanced guard reported a British bivouac at Néry, and General von Garnier at first ordered the division to deploy and charge, but, the ground being found unsuitable, this was changed to an attack on foot, which progressed to within 500 yards of the village. British reinforcements then came up and "we held our ground against greatly superior numbers until "2 P.M. (*sic*). We then had to withdraw or be destroyed. The brigades "were therefore directed to get through independently as best they could." Nothing is said about the guns. The Dragoon brigade apparently fled back into the forest of Compiègne. After dark it marched to the south-west (through Baron, according to inhabitants) and hid in the woods 15 miles south-west of Néry for 30 hours. On the 3rd September it escaped via Ermenonville back to Nanteuil. The traces found by the B.E.F. are noticed in the next chapter. Map 4.

According to "Deutsche Kavallerie," pp. 78, 79, the *4th Cavalry Division* at first withdrew eastward, but, hearing the sound of firing at St. Sauveur in the north and at Crépy en Valois to the east (in actions described later in the text) decided that the path to safety lay to the south, and the brigades moved independently in that direction with the hope of concealing themselves in the forest and of doubling back north when the Allies had passed. This they actually accomplished, though at the cost of their remaining guns and of a considerable amount of transport and equipment. The brigades hid, without food or ammunition, in the great woods on either side of Rozières (just north-east of Baron) and saw the British columns march down the main road through Baron. "On account of want of "ammunition, an attack of the isolated brigades on the numerically "superior infantry columns was not possible." They remained in hiding until the afternoon of the 2nd September.

Von Kluck merely states that after a successful surprise the *4th Cavalry Division* became seriously engaged with superior forces, and incurred heavy losses. Von Kuhl ("Marne," p. 121) says that it suffered so heavily that on the 3rd September it was not reassembled and was not able to advance on the 4th with the rest of the corps. Perhaps this is the reason why it remained on the Ourcq with the *IV. Reserve Corps*. Altogether, the

### The Rear-guard Action of Crépy en Valois

Maps 4 & 17. Further east, about Mermont and the ground north of Crépy en Valois, the outpost line of the 5th Division, held by the 13th Infantry Brigade, was attacked at 6 A.M. by mounted troops of the *IV. Corps* and by *Jäger*.[1] The pressure did not become serious until 10 A.M., when the 5th Division, which had delayed its march in consequence of the fighting at Néry, began to retire; it then fell chiefly upon the West Kents on the left of the line, where the Germans delivered an infantry attack from Béthancourt (4 miles due north of Crépy). The West Kents were supported by a section of the 119th Battery, which came into action within one hundred yards of the firing line, opened at fourteen hundred yards' range and, firing one hundred and fifty rounds in five minutes, brought the Germans to a standstill. By noon the outposts having become rear guard had fallen back to the south of Crépy; the Germans did not follow except with cavalry patrols, and all trouble ceased on this part of the line. On the right flank, the 2nd Duke of Wellington's holding the cross roads at "Raperie" (1 mile N.N.E. of Crépy), were supported by the two remaining batteries of the XXVII. Brigade R.F.A.; and under cover of these guns the brigadier was able to withdraw his battalions with little difficulty.

### The Rear-guard Actions of Villers Cottérêts

Maps 4 & 17. Still further to the east, the I. Corps marched at 4 A.M. by two roads through the forest of Villers Cottérêts. The 1st Division from Missy took the Soissons road, which skirts the eastern side of Villers Cottérêts, and turns thence south-eastward on La Ferté Milon.

The 2nd Division, on the west of the 1st, moved by the road which passes through Vivières[2] and Rond de la Reine and the western side of Villers Cottérêts south-west upon Pisseleux and Boursonne.

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1st September was decidedly to the disadvantage of the German cavalry, for, as will be seen, the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* were unable to advance, far less pursue as ordered (see footnote 2, p. 246).

[1] According to von Kluck the *IV. Corps* was in action north of Crépy en Valois later in the afternoon, and the first contact was with the five *Jäger* battalions of von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* ("Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 77).

[2] Spelt Viviers on some maps.

The 5th Cavalry Brigade covered the right rear from the region of Montgobert, and the 3rd Cavalry Brigade the left rear from Mortefontaine and Taillefontaine, both outside the forest. 1 Sept. 1914.

Here again it was the western flank that was first engaged, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade being attacked on reaching Taillefontaine (5 miles N.N.W. of Villers Cottérêts) by a force of all arms advancing from the north.[1] As the brigade drew back to the north-western corner of the Forest of Villers Cottérêts, the 4th Hussars were continuously engaged until past noon, and lost their commanding officer, Lt.-Colonel Hogg, in the sharp fighting in the woodlands.

A little to the east of Taillefontaine the 4th (Guards) Brigade was covering the retirement of the 2nd Division, with the Irish Guards and 2/Coldstream, under Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. George Morris of the former regiment, in position between Vivières and Puiseux, and the 2/Grenadier and 3/Coldstream in second line at Rond de la Reine. About 10 A.M. Colonel Morris's troops were attacked by a force of all arms moving from north-west to south-east. The 9th Battery replied effectively to the German guns, and the firing so far died away that Colonel Morris sent back the 2/Coldstream with orders to retire to the railway north of Villers Cottérêts, and prepared to follow them with the Irish Guards. Just then, however, he received a verbal order from the brigadier not to fall back too fast, since it was intended to give the main body of the division a long halt from 10 A.M. till 1 P.M. The 2/Coldstream were already gone past recall, owing to the density of the forest, but the Irish Guards stood fast, and, about 10.45 A.M., were again and more seriously attacked. A company of the Grenadiers was sent forward to reinforce them, but before the Irish Guards could be extricated, the Germans opened a direct attack upon the western front and flank of the second line. This line was drawn up along a grass ride which followed the highest ridge in the forest, and passes from west to east through the open space called Rond de la Reine to another open space, about a mile distant, named Croix de Belle Vue. The 3/Coldstream were on the west of Rond de la Reine, being widely extended so as to block the numerous rides that run from north to south towards

[1] Probably the advanced guard of the *III. Corps*. "Schlachten und Gefechte" states that the *III. Corps* and the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* fought at Villers Cottérêts, on the 1st September. "Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 77, however, states the two cavalry divisions were in action near Verberie and spent the night in two villages north of it.

Haramont, and therefore had wide intervals between companies. The 2/Grenadiers were on the right. The Germans soon detected the gaps between the companies of the Coldstream and penetrated between them; but the battalion, though compelled to fall back, did so very slowly, each isolated party fighting vigorously as best it could. The Grenadiers were in like case, and behaved in like manner, and both battalions were still close to their original positions when company by company the Irish Guards at last joined them. Colonel Morris was killed early in this first serious engagement of his regiment. Brigadier-General Scott-Kerr was severely wounded while leaving Rond de la Reine, the Germans having brought up a machine gun which raked the broad main ride. Thus there was no one for a time in general command; but the three British battalions were so much intermixed and the fighting in the woods was unavoidably so confused, that little or no control was possible. However, Grenadiers, Coldstream and Irish fought their way back, contesting every inch of ground, to Villers Cottérêts, the 3/Coldstream retiring on their second battalion, which was now on the railway line just to the north of the town, and the remainder further to the east. The 17th Battery was in position north of Villers Cottérêts to support them, but did not fire, the Guards having beaten off their assailants for the present. It was by now about 2 P.M.

Meanwhile the 6th Infantry Brigade had been halted about a mile south of Pisseleux, immediately south of Villers Cottérêts, to cover the retreat of the Guards, two companies of the Royal Berkshire being deployed upon either flank of the 9th Battery. The 5th Infantry Brigade had been ordered by 2nd Division Headquarters to entrench in echelon a little further to the south-west, to serve as a rallying point for both brigades. Through the 5th Infantry Brigade the Guards retired, with the 2/Coldstream as rear guard; the 17th Battery moved with them and unlimbered on the right of the 9th. Towards 4 P.M. the Germans, having apparently moved south-west from Villers Cottérêts, opened heavy rifle fire from the west of the railway, while their horse artillery engaged the British batteries. These last, after a sharp duel, were ordered to retire; but the teams of the 17th Battery could not come up until the 1/King's had pushed forward to the western side of the railway and effectually checked the advance of the German infantry and artillery. Fighting lasted until

6 P.M., when the King's withdrew, under cover of the 2/Coldstream, and the action came to an end. The number of the enemy engaged was very superior to the British.[1] The fight cost the 4th (Guards) Brigade over three hundred officers and men, and the 6th Infantry Brigade one hundred and sixty. Two platoons of the Grenadiers were surrounded and killed at Rond de la Reine, fighting to the last man. Some weeks later it was ascertained from prisoners that the Germans had suffered very heavily in this affair, having lost all sense of direction and fired on each other. 1 Sept. 1914.

### General Movements on the 1st September

During these clashes of the rear guards, the main body of the British Army tramped on through intense heat until far into the evening. The 1st Division reached its halting place about La Ferté Milon, 16 miles from its starting point, between 7 and 9 P.M. The 2nd Division and the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades arrived at Betz (8 miles west of La Ferté Milon), and the villages to the east of it, after a nineteen-mile march, from one to two hours later. Of the II. Corps, the 3rd Division marched quite untroubled to the villages south-west of Betz, while the 5th Division, with greater precautions, but equally unhindered after the first bickering of the morning, came into Nanteuil (7 miles west of Betz) between 7.30 and 9 P.M. Sketch 4. Map 18.

On the extreme west, after the fight at Néry, the 11th Infantry Brigade began to withdraw from St. Sauveur (3 miles east of Verberie), the 12th Infantry Brigade being already at 9.30 A.M. in position 6 miles south of St. Sauveur between Mont Cornon and Chamicy. At 10 A.M. the Germans[2] attacked the 1/Somerset L.I. and 1/Rifle Brigade, which were covering the retirement of the two remaining battalions of the 11th Infantry Brigade, and were beaten off with considerable loss. This ended the British fighting in this quarter for the day. At 11 A.M. the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Brigades were sent to take up a line from Mont Cornon north-westwards to Villeneuve, and Map 4.

[1] See footnote, p. 241.

[2] The advanced guard of the *II. Corps*. Von Kluck says that "the "*II. Corps*, supported by the *Cavalry Corps*, became involved in heavy "fighting for the possession of the important Oise crossings at Verberie and "St. Sauveur." The Provisional Division of Sordet's Cavalry Corps and some battalions of Chausseurs Alpins, the right of General Maunoury's Army, which was also falling back, were engaged at Verberie.

shortly after noon the 4th Division, passing through them, continued its march southward to Fresnoy, Rozières and
Map 18. Baron, to the west of the 5th Division. The Cavalry Division took up its billets to the west of the 4th Division along the northern edge of the Forest of Ermenonville from Fontaine to Mont l'Évêque. The march, though absolutely unhindered by the enemy, was an anxious one, for there were persistent rumours that German cavalry was in the Forest of Ermenonville to the south of the British Cavalry Division. When the 1/Rifle Brigade entered Rozières at 7 P.M., they found that three hundred Uhlans had just quitted the village in great haste, leaving a machine gun and sundry articles of equipment behind them.[1]

During the 31st August several telegrams had passed between the Secretary of State for War and the British Commander-in-Chief.[2] It appeared to the Cabinet that Sir John French had determined to retire so far out of the Allied line that he would frustrate their policy of co-operating closely with the French and rendering them continuous support; the French President and General Joffre seemed also to be under this impression.[3] As it was difficult to judge of the situation in London, it was decided that Lord Kitchener should himself proceed to France and discuss it verbally with the Commander-in-Chief, so as to ensure that there would be no break-down in the relations between the Chiefs of the French and British Armies. Leaving the choice of the meeting place to Sir John French —who fixed the British Embassy at Paris—Lord Kitchener left London at 2 A.M. on the 1st September, crossed the

[1] These troops are now known to be the survivors of Néry. Von Kluck says that the *4th Cavalry Division* "incurred heavy losses at Rozières" (see footnote 2, p. 239).

[2] The telegrams will be found in Appendix 22.

[3] According to M. Poincaré's preface to the French edition of Sir George Arthur's "Life of Lord Kitchener," p. ix :—

"Field-Marshal French operated with excessive independence, and "strove, above all, to maintain his divisions intact.

"On Sunday, 30th August, General Joffre, uneasy at seeing French "hold himself thus aloof, telephoned to M. Millerand, the Minister of "War, that he feared the British were not for the moment disposed to "fight. . . . Next day, Monday, the Commander-in-Chief of our Armies "sent me a liaison officer to beg me to intervene and ensure that Field-"Marshal French should not carry out his retreat too rapidly, and should "make up his mind to contain the enemy who was on the British front."

The President then imparted his fears and the request of General Joffre to the British Ambassador, Sir Francis Bertie. About 10 P.M. Sir Francis came to the Élysée with an orderly officer bearing a written answer from the British Commander-in-Chief—"An answer, unfortunately, not very conclusive." (This letter cannot be found in the British records. Sir John French in his "1914," p. 95, merely says, "I refused.")

Channel to Havre in a destroyer, arrived in Paris about 3 P.M., met Sir John shortly after, and spent nearly three hours with him. 1 Sept. 1914.

The result of the interview was recorded in a telegram sent by Lord Kitchener to the Government at 7.30 P.M., before he started on his return journey. It is as follows :

"French's troops are now engaged in the fighting line, where "he will remain conforming to the movements of the French "army, though at the same time acting with caution to avoid "being in any way unsupported on his flanks."

On the 3rd September, Sir John French, having received a copy of this telegram, replied :

"I fully understand your instructions. . . . I am in full "accord with Joffre and the French."

The British Commander-in Chief, on returning to his headquarters at Dammartin, 20 miles from Paris, at 6.45 P.M., after the interview with Lord Kitchener, found that the day's work had not been unsatisfactory : the enemy had been shaken off after several sharp actions, and the march, though long and exhausting to the men, had finally reunited the British Army for the first time since the I. and II. Corps had been separated on the 25th August. The Cavalry Division was in touch with the French cavalry about Senlis, to the westwards of which, to a line from Creil to the vicinity of Beauvais, General Maunoury had successfully brought back the French Sixth Army. The left of the French Fifth Army was at Soissons; as it had retired due south from Guise and the British Expeditionary Force had marched south-west a day ahead, the gap between the two was widening. Aerial reconnaissance had been difficult until the afternoon, owing to the mist, but from 3 P.M. onward the Flying Corps sent in a series of valuable observations, all tending to confirm the previous reports of a general wheel of von Kluck's army to the south-east. German troops were thick upon both banks of the Oise from Noyon southward to Verberie ; but the greater number were already on the eastern side of the river, and the heads of heavy columns had reached Villers Cottérêts and Crépy en Valois. These seemed to be wheeling to the south. It might be that this was due to the direction taken by the roads at these two points, but it was judged most important to withdraw the British Army out of reach of a night attack. Sketch 5. Map 18.

Soon after midday the corps commanders had been

warned by the Chief of the General Staff that the retirement would be continued on the morrow towards the Marne, and roads had been allotted; but at 7 P.M., on realizing that the enemy was so near and in such force, and that some of his cavalry were actually behind the British front, Sir John French decided to continue the retreat earlier than he had intended and all the corps were ordered to get clear by a night march.[1] At the same time, G.H.Q., to which German cavalry escaping from Néry had passed quite close, commenced moving back from Dammartin to Lagny.

### German Movements on 1st September

Sketch 5. Maps 4 & 18.

Turning back to the movements of the Germans during the 1st September, von Kluck, whose Army was now again in contact with the British, states that he made another effort on that day to catch them up. Their presence on his flank had compelled him to desist from his attempt to reach and roll up the left flank of the French Fifth Army. He therefore ordered his corps to turn south to settle with the British. His *IX. Corps* (less the *17th Division*, which was still in rear, as it had been co-operating with units of the *Second Army* in the fighting on the Oise south of Mont d'Origny on the 30th), *III. Corps* and *IV. Corps* having crossed the Aisne between Ambleny and Compiègne were to press southward; the *II. Corps* was to reach the Oise at Verberie; the *II. Cavalry Corps*, from near Compiègne, was to move eastwards to attack the French in flank via Villers Cottérêts.[2]

As a result of the day's operations, the *18th Division* of the *IX. Corps* reached Longpont (6 miles east of Villers Cottérêts).

The *III. Corps*, marching on two roads via Vivières and Taillefontaine, came in contact with the rear guard

[1] Appendix 23.

[2] Kluck, p. 80. These orders seem to have been altered, for "Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 76, says that at 4 P.M. on the 31st, von der Marwitz ordered "a relentless pursuit" (*rücksichtslose Verfolgung*) that same night in the direction Nanteuil le Haudouin. Led horses, bridging train and telegraph vehicles were left behind. The *9th Cavalry Division*, followed by the *2nd*, marching on the main road Compiègne—Verberie, was held up at the latter place and St. Sauveur east of it, and got no further on the 1st September. The *4th Cavalry Division* moved east of the others and came to Néry, as we have seen. The five *Jäger* battalions of the corps were sent to Crépy en Valois and fought there. Kuhl's "Marne," p. 110, states that the *II. Cavalry Corps* was held up at Verberie, and shows it on his map about five miles south of Néry on the night of the 1st/2nd September.

of the British I. Corps near Villers Cottérêts, as already related, and halted there for the night. 1 Sept. 1914.

The *IV. Corps*, also marching by two roads Compiègne —Crépy and Choisy—Pierrefonds, halted at Crépy, after its fight with the 5th Division.

The *II. Corps*, after its action at St. Sauveur with the 4th Division and later at Verberie with the French, halted at the latter place for the night.

The *IV. Reserve Corps*, protecting the right flank, reached Quinquempoix about twenty-five miles south of Amiens.

The general advance made by the German *First Army* on the 1st September, owing to the opposition with which it met, was under ten miles,[1] and von Kluck had not struck to any purpose either the French Fifth Army or the B.E.F.

[1] See Kluck's map.

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE LAST STAGES OF THE RETREAT. 2ND TO 5TH SEPTEMBER

### 2ND SEPTEMBER: RETIREMENT TO MEAUX—DAMMARTIN

(See Sketches 1, 4, 5; Maps 2, 4, 19, 20, 21, 22)

Sketch 4. Maps 4 & 19.

THE Army was growing hardened to continued retirements; but in the I. Corps, to make the conditions easier for the men, General Haig on the 1st September decided to send off by train from Villers Cottérêts about half of the ammunition carried by his divisional ammunition columns, and to use the fifty empty waggons to carry kits and exhausted soldiers. This was an extreme measure, taken only after mature deliberation, but it was more than justified by the result.

The next day in pursuance of Sir John French's orders, the divisions began moving back between 1 A.M. and 3 A.M. from their billets between La Ferté Milon and Senlis to the line of villages between Meaux and Dammartin, a march of some twelve miles. The I. Corps was on the right or east, the II. Corps in the centre and the III. Corps on the left, with the cavalry on either flank of the force. It was absolutely unmolested during this move. The 5th Cavalry Brigade, which covered the eastern flank of the I. Corps, heard news of a German squadron moving from Villers Cottérêts upon La Ferté Milon, but saw nothing. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade, on the west of the 5th, had been in motion for fully six hours and was well south of Betz before German shells began to burst over the extreme tail of the rear guard. An hour or so later six or eight German squadrons were seen approaching Bouillancy, the next village south of Betz, but were driven off by the fire of D and E Batteries. The brigade, being no further troubled, then retired slowly to Isles les Villenoy behind

the right of the I. Corps, where it arrived late in the evening. 2 Sept. 1914.

The three brigades of the Cavalry Division on the left of the B.E.F. had been disturbed on the night of the 1st/2nd September by more than one report that the whole or parts of the German *4th Cavalry Division* were moving south through the Forest of Ermenonville behind the British left flank; and at 2 A.M. the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, on the extreme left, had been ordered to march at once from Mont l'Évêque to clear the defile through the forest for the division. The brigade moved off at 2.30 A.M., taking the road through the forest towards Ermenonville. On debouching from the south-eastern edge it found the road littered with saddles, equipment and clothing. Some enemy force had evidently been in bivouac there and had hastily decamped. Reports came in from inhabitants that two squadrons of Uhlans were at Ermenonville and the next village east of it; but the British were too late to intercept them. The enemy had withdrawn rapidly, and in the wooded country it was useless to pursue him. Before reaching Ermenonville the brigade came across some motor lorries of the 4th Divisional Ammunition Column, which had run into a party of German cavalry during the night, and also four abandoned German guns, the marks upon which proved that they were part of the batteries that had been in action at Néry. It may be added here that, except for skirmishes of cavalry patrols, there was no further contact with the enemy during the rest of the retreat.

Though the march of the British force this day was only a short one, averaging about twelve miles, and the leading units got in early, it was evening before all were in their billets. The heat of the day was intense and suffocating, and made marching so exhausting that several long halts were ordered. In spite of these, there were some cases of heat-stroke.

The march of the I. Corps proved specially trying, since the valley of the Ourcq, for the first half of the march, formed an almost continuous defile. During the passage of this region, the divisions were directed to piquet the high ground as in mountain warfare. The movement presented a fine opportunity to a really active and enterprising enemy, but no such enemy appeared.

An inhabitant of the district has put on record the appearance of the British during this period of the retreat:

"The soldiers, phlegmatic and stolid, march without "appearing to hurry themselves; their calm is in striking "contrast to the confusion of the refugees. They pass a "night in the villages of the Ourcq. It is a pacific invasion ". . . as sportsmen who have just returned from a suc- "cessful raid, our brave English eat with good appetite, "drink solidly, and pay royally those who present their "bills; . . . and depart at daybreak, silently like ghosts, "on the whistle of the officer in charge."[1]

Sketch 4. Map 19. The position of the Army at nightfall on the 2nd September was as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 5th Cavalry Brigade<br>I Corps | In the villages just north of Meaux. |
| 3rd Cavalry Brigade | Isles les Villenoy, S.S.W. of Meaux. |
| II. Corps | In the area Monthyon—Montgé—Villeroy. |
| III. Corps | Eve—Dammartin. |
| Cavalry Division | In the area Thieux—Moussy le Vieux—Le Mesnil Amelot. |

Roughly speaking, therefore, its front extended from Meaux north-west to Dammartin. From Dammartin the French Provisional Cavalry Division[2] prolonged the line to Senlis, from which point north-westward through Creil to Mouy and beyond it lay General Maunoury's Sixth Army. On the right of the British the French Fifth Army was still a good march north of them, with the left of its infantry south-west of Fère en Tardenois, some twenty-five miles away, and its cavalry north of Chateau Thierry and somewhat nearer.

### Operations of the German *First* and *Second Armies*, 2nd September 1914

Map 4. The 2nd September had thus passed more or less uneventfully for the troops, but aerial reconnaissance revealed interesting changes on the side of the enemy. His general march south-eastward seemed for the time to have come to an end, and to have given place to a southerly movement. The general front of von Kluck's Army was covered by cavalry from Villers Cottérêts through Crépy en Valois and Villeneuve to Clermont.[3] Behind it from

[1] "Les Champs de l'Ourcq, September 1914." By J. Roussel-Lépine.
[2] Formed temporarily from the fittest units of Sordet's Cavalry Corps.
[3] The *II. Cavalry Corps* was, according to von Kluck, in line between the *IV.* and *II. Corps*, so part of the covering cavalry was divisional.

east to west opposite the British were the *III.*, *IV.* and *II. Corps*, and there were indications that the heads of the columns were halting to allow the rear to close up, as if apprehensive of danger from the south. The *IV. Reserve Corps* was to the right rear north-west of Clermont about St. Just, and the *IX. Corps* was east of Villers Cottérêts, on the same alignment as the cavalry. Up to 4 P.M. no hostile troops of any kind had passed a line, about ten to twelve miles away, drawn from Mareuil (at the junction of the Clignon with the Ourcq) westward through Betz to Nanteuil le Haudouin. In fact, it seemed as though von Kluck had not foreseen any such collision with the British as had taken place on the 1st. Possibly he believed them to have moved south-eastward, and such, indeed, had been their direction on the 30th, though on the 31st it had been changed to south-west to leave more space for the retreat of the French Fifth Army. Moreover, but for the accident which prevented the right and centre of the British Army from reaching the halting-places ordered for the evening of the 31st, it is probable that there would have been no serious collision at all between the British and the Germans on the 1st September, but that the Germans would have merely brushed against the British rear guards, reported the main body to be still in retreat, and continued their south-easterly march to take the French Fifth Army in flank. 2 Sept. 1914.

Events, however, having fallen out as they did, von Kluck made one further attempt to cut off the British. Meanwhile on his left von Bülow was pressing forward against the French Fifth Army and had, with his main body, reached the line of the Aisne from Pontavert (14 miles north-west of Rheims) to Soissons, the head of his advance being on the Vesle. On his front, the Fifth Army had fallen back to the line Rheims—Fère en Tardenois. Sketch 5. Map 19.

The apprehensions of the British Commander-in-Chief that on the night of the 1st/2nd September von Kluck was making preparations to attack him turn out to have been fully justified.[1] From a captured document,[2] the German general had learnt that "the British Army intended to go "into rest billets midday on the 1st September south of the "line Verberie—Crépy en Valois—La Ferté Milon. It, "therefore, seemed still possible to reach it." At 10.15 P.M. on the 1st September he issued orders for the *First Army*

[1] See p. 245 and Kluck, p. 81.
[2] Captured on a cyclist. Kuhl's "Marne," p. 110.

to attack the British next day: "the *III.* and *IV. Corps* "against their front, crossing the line Verberie—Crépy at "7 A.M.; the *IX. Corps*, starting at 2 A.M., to envelop their "right, and the *II.* with *IV. Reserve* in rear of it, to envelop "their left, whilst keeping a lookout towards Paris. The "*II. Cavalry Corps* was to connect the *IV.* and *II. Corps.*

"These arrangements were in vain, the British Army "escaped envelopment by a timely withdrawal," for it slipped away in the night, as already related. The only collision that took place was between the German *II. Corps* and French cavalry and infantry near Senlis, where the latter offered a stubborn resistance.[1] "The possibility of "dealing a decisive blow against the British could no "longer be reckoned on." Von Kluck, therefore, after another half day had been wasted, determined to wheel his two eastern corps south-east against the flank of the French Fifth Army in order to assist von Bülow. The rest of the *First Army* was to continue its advance on Paris. Orders to this effect were issued at 12.15 P.M. and 1 P.M. on the 2nd. In spite of von Kluck's zigzag movements subsequent to the battle of Le Cateau, his Army was by this time a clear day's march ahead of the *Second*, and at night his general front curved forward from near La Ferté Milon to Senlis.

## The Passage of the Marne

Map 4. Whilst in Paris on the 1st September, Sir John French made a proposal to the French Minister of War to organize a line of defence on the Marne and stand the attack of the enemy. This was rejected on the 2nd by General Joffre, mainly, apparently, on account of the position of the Fifth Army, which on that date was close to the Marne with the enemy near at hand. He added: "I consider that the "co-operation of the British Army in the defence of Paris is "the only co-operation which can give useful results." Late in the evening, his *Instruction Générale* No. 4, which forecast a retreat behind the Seine, reached Sir John French.[2] The Field-Marshal therefore gave orders [3] for the Marne to be crossed on the 3rd—as did General Lanrezac also to his Army—and for the retreat of the British Army to be resumed in a south-easterly direction, as its continuance in

[1] Von Kluck says the British Cavalry Division was in action there, but this is a mistake.

[2] Appendices 24 and 25.

[3] Appendix 26.

a south-westerly direction would have brought it inside the perimeter of the entrenched camp of Paris, besides tending to increase the gap between its right and the left of the Fifth Army. Since this movement was in the nature of a flank march across the enemy's front—although it turned out that his columns were marching practically parallel to the British—it was necessary to make arrangements to keep the Germans off the high ground on the north bank of the Marne during its execution. 3 Sept. 1914.

Early in the morning of the 3rd September, therefore, the 5th and 3rd Cavalry Brigades were thrown out to an east and west line north-eastwards of Meaux; the former (which was supported by a battalion and a battery) covering the loop of the Marne from St. Aulde westwards to Lizy sur Ourcq, and the latter the ground thence westwards to Barcy. German cavalry patrols appeared on the front of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade between 8 and 9 A.M., but did not approach closely, and at 10.30 A.M. the brigade crossed the Marne at Germigny, behind the centre of its sector, and then moving south-eastwards behind its sister brigade, fell into the main road at La Ferté sous Jouarre at noon. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was not troubled until 4 P.M., when a hostile column, including four batteries, appeared at May en Multien, due north of Lizy on the western bank of the Ourcq. There was some exchange of rifle and artillery fire as Brigadier-General Chetwode slowly withdrew eastwards, but the Germans were evidently content to see him go, for they did not follow, but took up billets quietly on the western bank of the Ourcq from Lizy northwards. The 5th Cavalry Brigade then crossed the Marne at La Ferté sous Jouarre and reached its billets at 7 P.M., having had no more than five casualties.

Meanwhile, having started between 3 and 4 A.M., the 1st Division had crossed the Marne at Trilport, the 2nd and 3rd at Meaux, the 5th at Isles les Villenoy, the 4th at Lagny and the Cavalry Division at Gournay. They blew up all the bridges behind them as they moved south-east, and by evening the Army was distributed along a line south of the Marne from Jouarre westward to Nogent, I. Corps patrols being again in touch with troops of the French Fifth Army which was also south of the Marne. The Sixth Army, north of the Marne, slightly overlapped the British front on the left. Sketch 4. Map 20.

This march too had proved a trying one; it was long in point of time as well as distance, for the roads were

much crowded with vehicles of refugees, and some units were as much as eighteen hours on the road.

Aerial reconnaissance on this day established the fact that von Kluck had resumed his south-eastward movement with rapidity and vigour. By 11 A.M. the head of the German *IX. Corps* had already passed the Marne and had a sharp engagement with the French at Chateau Thierry, 15 miles north-east of the British right. By evening the heads of the *III.* and *IV. Corps* had also crossed the Marne at Chézy and La Ferté sous Jouarre, respectively, heading for the gap between the French Fifth Army and the British Expeditionary Force. But one and all arrived too late at the river, for the whole of the French Fifth Army was by that time safely across the Marne, and its left had fallen back after the fight at Chateau Thierry, and was now in line with the British though still separated by a gap of about ten miles. At 4.35 P.M. the British Commander-in-Chief, certain from the air information that von Kluck was moving from west to east and intended no immediate action against him, warned his corps commanders that, unless the situation changed, the troops would remain in their present billets, and would probably have complete rest next day. The time, however, was not yet ripe for General Joffre to make his counter-stroke, and he even proposed to retire behind the Seine if it should be necessary for the success of his manœuvre. At 11.50 P.M., therefore, Sir John French issued orders [1] for the remaining bridges over the Marne in the British area to be destroyed and for the Army to continue its retreat southward. The intention being to bring the whole B.E.F. behind the Grand Morin, the right or eastern flank had to be swung back. The I. Corps, therefore, was to move first, through Coulommiers, with the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades pushed out to the east, in order to protect its flank and to gain contact with Conneau's Cavalry Corps, which was reported to be at Rebais, 7 miles away. The II. and III. Corps and Cavalry Division were to stand fast until the I. Corps had reached the Grand Morin, and then fall back in line with it. Every precaution was to be taken to conceal the billets of the troops from aircraft. The movements of the British Army during the past few days had already misled the enemy once and, if its whereabouts could now be hidden, might mislead him again.[2]

[1] Appendix 27.

[2] In this, according to von Kluck, the II. and III. Corps were successful; the march and bivouacs of the I. Corps only were observed.

### Retirement to the Grand Morin

Accordingly, on the 4th, soon after daybreak, the 5th Cavalry Brigade, with the 3rd in support, advanced eastward to Doue midway between the two Morins, and sent patrols forward along both banks of the Petit Morin. At the same time it dispatched the Scots Greys to the east towards Rebais to meet the French cavalry there. At 8 A.M. the patrols reported a hostile column of all arms moving south-east along the main road north of the Petit Morin from La Ferté sous Jouarre to Montmirail, but there were evidently parties of the enemy south of the valley, for a troop of the Greys found Germans at Rebais, and had such sharp fighting that only five men of it escaped. At 11.45 A.M. a column of cavalry with guns and three battalions of infantry—evidently a flank guard—were seen moving south-east on the heights between the Montmirail road and the Petit Morin, from Boitron upon Sablonnières; some of them crossing the stream, attacked an advanced party of the 5th Cavalry Brigade about a mile east of Doue, but without success. The enemy seems then to have decided that it was time to thrust back this prying English cavalry, and manœuvred to turn Brigadier-General Chetwode's position from the south; but when he fell back under cover of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade and the Germans occupied his ground about Doue, the latter were at once engaged by E Battery, which disabled one of the German guns and did considerable damage among the gun teams. At 6 P.M. Brigadier-General Gough in turn withdrew the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, protected by the fire of the 113th and 114th Batteries, and by the 2nd Infantry Brigade, which was in position about Aulnoy. He then crossed the Petit Morin at Coulommiers, and made for Chailly, a little to the south-east. 4 Sept. 1914. Map 4.

Meanwhile, the I. Corps had marched southward upon Coulommiers, not wholly without expectation of interference, for the bridge at La Ferté sous Jouarre from lack of explosives had not been thoroughly destroyed. About 8 A.M. indeed a German battalion crossed the river by this bridge,[1] but it did not immediately press on, and the 1st Division, pursuing its march methodically, halted at Aulnoy and Coulommiers in the afternoon. The 2nd Sketch 4. Map 21.

[1] The German *IV. Corps* and *II. Cavalry Corps* crossed at La Ferté sous Jouarre.

Division, falling back by brigades in succession, a little further to the west, upon Mouroux and Giremoutiers, saw nothing but a few cavalry patrols. The II. and III. Corps and Cavalry Division actually enjoyed a day of rest on the 4th until after dark, when they too moved off south through the night, as will be related. For the moment the Army was concentrated on the Grand Morin.

The information obtained by the Flying Corps on this day was particularly full and complete, giving the bivouacs of all the corps of the German *First Army* and the lines of march of their columns in a south-easterly direction across the front of the B.E.F. It confirmed the observations of the cavalry to the effect that the main portion of von Kluck's Army having crossed the Marne, its left on Chateau Thierry and its right on La Ferté sous Jouarre, was pressing on through Montmirail — La Ferté Gaucher against the left of the French Fifth Army (the XVIII. Corps, with Valabrègue's Group of Reserve divisions in echelon behind it, and Conneau's Cavalry Corps), and against the gap between it and the B.E.F. General Franchet d'Esperey, who had taken over command of the Fifth Army from General Lanrezac [1] the previous day, was continuing the withdrawal, swinging his left back to meet the threat against it.

It may be noted that on this day the French Ninth Army, under General Foch, came into existence between the Fourth and Fifth Armies. It was organized merely for convenience of command from the left of the Fourth Army, and its formation did not, therefore, affect the general situation.[2]

During the 4th September, General Galliéni, the recently appointed Military Governor of Paris, under whose direct orders the French Sixth Army had been acting since the 31st August "in the interests of the defence of Paris," came with General Maunoury to British headquarters at Melun.[3] Sir John French was absent visiting his troops, but to his Chief of the Staff General Galliéni pointed out that

[1] For an account of his sudden removal, see his book, "Le Plan de Campagne français et le premier mois de la Guerre," p. 276 *et seq.*

[2] The French Ninth Army came officially into existence as an independent command at 11 P.M. on the 4th September. It had actually been formed on the 29th August as a "Détachement d'Armée." It consisted of the IX. and XI. Corps, 52nd and 60th Reserve Divisions and 9th Cavalry Division from the left of the Fourth Army, and the 42nd Division from the Third Army. Its formation merely reduced the size of the Fourth Army, and put the Fourth and Ninth Armies where the Fourth had been.

[3] See "Mémoires du Général Galliéni. Défense de Paris," p. 121, for an account of this visit.

advantage ought to be taken at once of the opportunity the German *First Army* had given by offering its right flank. He added that he had ordered the Army of Paris, as he called his combined forces of the Sixth Army and Paris garrison, to move eastwards that afternoon. He stated that he proposed, with the concurrence of General Joffre, whom he had informed, to attack the German *IV. Reserve Corps*, which was covering the movement of the *First Army*. This formation had been reported that morning marching in two columns towards Trilport and Lizy sur Ourcq. Galliéni suggested that the British Army should cease to retreat, and take the offensive next day in co-operation with his forces. In the absence of the British Commander-in-Chief, nothing could be decided, and, after waiting three hours until 5 P.M., General Galliéni left. When he reached Paris, he found a telegram from General Joffre [1] stating that "he considered it more advantageous to bring the "Sixth Army to the left [south] bank of the Marne, to the "south of Lagny" (where the British left then was), and directing him "to come to an understanding with the Field-Marshal for the execution of the movement." 4 Sept. 1914.

General Joffre had also written to Sir John French on this day confirming his intention to adhere to the plan of retirement already communicated to him.[2] He added :—

"In case the German Armies should continue the "movement south-south-east, thus moving away from the "Seine and Paris, perhaps you will consider, as I do, that "your action will be most effective on the right bank of "that river between Marne and Seine.

"Your left resting on the Marne, supported by the "entrenched camp of Paris, will be covered by the mobile "garrison of the capital, which will attack eastwards on "the left bank [3] of the Marne."

This letter left no doubt that the Generalissimo wished the B.E.F. to be withdrawn further to make room for the Army of Paris south of the Marne,[4] and in view of the gap which existed between the B.E.F. and the Fifth Army, and "because the Germans were exercising some pressure "on Haig on this night [4th Sept.]," [5] Sir John French decided to retire "a few miles further south."

[1] "Mémoires du Général Galliéni," p. 222.
[2] See Appendix 28 for the original French.
[3] As a result of telephone communications between General Joffre and Galliéni on the 4th September this was changed to the right bank.
[4] See Sir John French's letter to Earl Kitchener. Appendix 29.
[5] Lord French's "1914," p. 109.

At 6.35 P.M., therefore, orders[1] were issued from British G.H.Q. at Melun, for the Army to move south-west on the 5th, pivoting on its left, so that its rear guards would reach, roughly a line drawn east and west through Tournan. The times of starting were left to the corps commanders. The Cavalry Division was further warned to be ready to move from the western to the eastern flank of the Army early on the 6th.

A message informing him of the movements ordered was sent to General Galliéni through the French Mission at British headquarters.

## The End of the Retreat

Map 4. Accordingly before dawn on the 5th, the I. Corps was again on the march southwards with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade as rear guard and the 5th as eastern flank guard. The latter had a skirmish at Chailly early in the morning, but otherwise the march was uneventful, and was indeed compared by the 3rd Cavalry Brigade to a march in peace time. The fighting troops of the III. Corps started at 4 A.M., but the II. Corps moved off several hours earlier, at 10 P.M., in order to avoid the heat of the day. Both corps were unmolested. During the 5th, definite orders for the Cavalry Division to move to the right flank were issued, and in the course of the afternoon it started eastwards across the rear of the Army.

Sketch 4. Map 22. Thus by nightfall, or a little later, the British force had reached its halting-places south-south-east of Paris, and faced somewhat east of north: the I. Corps in and west of Rozoy, the Cavalry Division to its right rear in Mormant and the villages north of it, the II. Corps on the left of the I., in and east of Tournan, and the III. Corps on the left of the II., from Ozoir la Ferrière southwards to Brie Comte Robert, touching the defences of Paris.

Meanwhile, during the 5th September, north-east of the capital, General Maunoury's Sixth Army had by General Galliéni's orders advanced north of the Marne towards the Ourcq, and in the afternoon had come into contact with the German *IV. Reserve Corps* between Meaux and St. Soupplets. This Army was steadily increasing in numbers as divisions reached it from the east.[2] On the right of the

[1] Appendix 30.

[2] It consisted on the 5th September of the VII. Corps, 45th Division, 55th and 56th Reserve Divisions, the Moroccan Brigade, and Gillet's

British, and slightly to the south of them, General Conneau's Cavalry Corps (4th, 8th and 10th Cavalry Divisions) was near Provins, on the extreme left of the Fifth Army, which had also retired during the 5th, and was now extended north-eastwards from Provins to Sézanne. Thus the gap in the Allied line on this side was reduced to less than fourteen miles, with four French and British cavalry divisions at hand to fill it. 5 Sept. 1914.

Opposite the French Fifth Army and the right of the B.E.F., von Kluck's Army had continued its south-eastward movement. As aeroplane reconnaissance clearly showed, the whole of it (except the *IV. Reserve Corps* and *4th Cavalry Division*, which were observing Paris) had passed the lines of the Ourcq and the Marne and had wheeled to the south, its front stretching along the line of the Grand Morin, which its advanced troops had crossed, from Esternay (near Sézanne) to Crécy (south of Meaux). On von Kluck's left, the *Second Army* was a day's march behind him, its right slightly overlapped by the *IX. Corps*, so that for a time there was an impression that he had been reinforced. The moment for which General Joffre had waited was come at last. Von Kluck, in his headlong rush eastwards, had, it appeared, ignored not only the fortress of Paris, but the Sixth Army which, with the British, was now in position, as a glance at the map will show, to fall in strength upon his right flank and rear. Sketch 5. Map 22.

Similarly, further east, parts of the German *Fifth Army* and the *Fourth Army* had swept past the western side of Verdun, with which fortress General Sarrail's Third Army, facing almost due west, was still in touch. Thus, whilst the German *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies* were held up by the eastern fortresses, the *Fifth*, *Fourth*, *Third*, *Second* and *First Armies* had penetrated into a vast bag or "pocket" between the fortresses of Verdun and Paris, the sides of which were held by unbeaten troops, ready to turn on the enemy directly the command should come to do so. Credit has been claimed for General Galliéni that he first discovered the eastward march of von Kluck and brought its significance to the notice of General Joffre, and that he

Cavalry Brigade—some 70,000 men with Sordet's Cavalry Corps attached. Behind it were a group of Territorial brigades under General Mercier-Milon, Ebener's Group of Reserve divisions (61st and 62nd), and the actual garrison of Paris, four divisions and a brigade of Territorial troops, with a brigade of Fusiliers Marins sent for police duties. The IV. Corps was just arriving, so General Galliéni reckoned he had about 150,000 men available for action as the Army of Paris.

immediately took appropriate action with the troops under his command, and prevailed upon the Commander-in-Chief to change his plan for retiring behind the Seine. Be this as it may, the decision to resume the offensive rested with General Joffre.

The retreat of the B.E.F. had continued, with only one halt, for thirteen days over a distance, as the crow flies, of one hundred and thirty-six miles, and as the men marched, at least two hundred miles, and that after two days' strenuous marching in advance to the Mons Canal. The mere statement of the distance gives no measure of the demands made upon the physical and moral endurance of the men, and but little idea of the stoutness with which they had responded to these demands. The misery that all ranks suffered is well summed up in the phrase of an officer: "I " would never have believed that men could be so tired and " so hungry and yet live." An artillery officer whose brigade marched and fought throughout the retreat with the same infantry brigade has noted in his diary that, on the average, mounted men had three hours', and infantry four hours' rest per day. The late General Sir Stanley Maude, who was on the III. Corps Staff, has put it on record that he did not average three hours' sleep out of the twenty-four;[1] officers of the lower staffs had less. But all these trials were now behind them: the Retreat from Mons was over.

There have been three other notable retreats in the history of the British Army. All three, that of Sir John Moore to Corunna in the winter of 1808–9, of Sir Arthur Wellesley after the battle of Talavera in 1809, and again from Burgos to Ciudad Rodrigo in 1812, were marred by serious lack of discipline, though the first was redeemed by its results and the success of the final action at Corunna, and the last was reckoned by critics to be the greatest of Wellington's achievements. The Retreat from Mons, on the other hand, was in every way honourable to the Army. The troops suffered under every disadvantage. The number of reservists in the ranks was on an average over one-half of the full strength, and the units were owing to the force of circumstances hurried away to the area of concentration before all ranks could resume acquaintance with their officers and comrades, and re-learn their business as soldiers. Arrived there, they were hastened forward by forced marches to the battle, confronted with greatly superior numbers of the most renowned army in Europe,

[1] Callwell's "Sir Stanley Maude," p. 120.

and condemned at the very outset to undergo the severest ordeal which can be imposed upon an army. They were short of food and sleep when they began their retreat, they continued it, always short of food and sleep, for thirteen days, as has been told; and at the end they were still an army, and a formidable army. They were never demoralized, for they rightly judged that they had never been beaten.[1] 5 Sept. 1914.

The B.E.F., forming as it did only a very small portion of the line of the French Armies commanded by General Joffre, had no independent strategical rôle in the opening phases of the war. When the Germans turned the Allied left by an unexpectedly wide movement through Belgium, the Generalissimo decided that his only chance of stopping them was "by abandoning ground and mounting a new operation";[2] to this Sir John French had naturally to conform. The operation, which involved the assembly of a new Army in the west to outflank the enemy, required time to prepare. General Joffre at first hoped, whilst his First and Second Armies held Lorraine, to be able to stand on the line Verdun—river Aisne (Vouziers—Berry au Bac)—Craonne—Laon—La Fère—Ham, and thence along the Somme. This line he intended to entrench.[3] The Germans, however, pressed on too closely to permit of it, and widened their turning movement. There was no alternative to fighting at a strategical and tactical disadvantage but a further general retirement—"hanging on as long as possible, avoiding any decisive action," but giving the enemy severe lessons as opportunities occurred.[4] Maps 2, 3 & 4.

Instead of being beaten piecemeal by superior forces as in 1870, the French, after the initial failure of their offensive, withdrew in good time. Such fights as took place, and there were many all along the front besides Guise,[5] resulted not in a Woerth or a Spicheren, but in the Allies slipping away after inflicting severe losses on the enemy.[6] In these operations, the B.E.F., at Mons and Le Cateau and in smaller actions, was eminently successful:

[1] A table of the length of the daily marches will be found in Appendix 31.
[2] Rapport du Général Joffre au Ministre de la Guerre, 25th Aug. 1914.
[3] Directive of 25th August, 22 hours.
[4] General Joffre's letter to G.H.Q. of 30th August.
[5] Beaufort, La Marfée, Murtin, Tremblois, Chilly, Launais, besides the battles of Signy l'Abbaye and Réthel.
[6] General Graf Stürgkh, head of the Austrian Mission at German G.H.Q., gives the heavy losses suffered by the Germans in the preliminary engagements as one of the principal reasons for the defeat at the Marne ("Im Deutschen Grossen Hauptquartier," p. 88).

it had no difficulty in more than holding its own whenever contact occurred, hitting hard and then marching off unmolested. Only those who have commanded British infantry can have any conception of what it can accomplish.

By some it has been thought that the B.E.F. could have done more; in particular it might have assisted the French at Guise. It has, however, been shown in the narrative[1] that one of the reasons that General Joffre ordered General Lanrezac to take the offensive was to relieve the pressure on the British, and he did not call on Sir John French to assist. The British Commander-in-Chief, in his dangerous position on the outer flank of the Allied Armies for many days, had not only to bear in mind General Joffre's general instructions to avoid decisive action and the necessity of husbanding his force for the coming battle when the Armies should turn, but to recall that he commanded nearly all the available trained staff officers, officers and men of the British Empire, the nucleus on which the New Armies were to be trained and initiated in war; above all, he had to remember the instructions of the Government, that "the greatest care must be exercised towards a minimum of losses and wastage."

On the 5th September there were some twenty thousand men absent of the original numbers of the B.E.F.; but, as in all great retreats, a large proportion of these rejoined later; the official returns show a figure of a little over fifteen thousand killed, wounded and missing. The loss of war material is difficult to set down exactly. Some transport was abandoned as is inevitable at such times; many of the valises and great-coats were discarded or burnt, and a very large proportion of the entrenching tools left behind. As to guns, forty-two fell into the enemy's hands as the result of active combat, and two or three more, through one mishap or another, were left behind. Such a casualty list can, in the circumstances, be only considered as astonishingly light. Its seriousness lay in the fact that, whether in guns or men, the loss had fallen almost wholly upon the left wing: the II. and III. Corps, and above all upon the II. Corps.

### The Change of Base

Sketch 1. Map 2.

It was impossible to expect that the deficiencies in men and material could be immediately made good. Practically all units received their first reinforcements—the "ten

[1] See pp. 218 and 227.

per cent reinforcements"—on the 4th and 5th September, and these, added to the replacement of the Munsters in the 1st (Guards) Brigade by the Cameron Highlanders (hitherto Army Troops), brought the I. Corps more or less up to strength. But the far graver losses of the II. Corps, especially in guns and vehicles, could not be so quickly repaired. The rapid advance of the Germans to the west had made the bases at Boulogne and Havre unsafe, and had actually dispossessed the British of their advanced base at Amiens. The advisability of a change of base was foreseen by the Q.M.G., Major-General Sir William Robertson, as early as the 24th August, and from that date all further movement of men or stores to Havre or Boulogne was stopped. By the 27th, Boulogne had been cleared of stores and closed as a port of disembarkation; and on the 29th St. Nazaire on the Loire was selected as the new base.[1] At that time there were sixty thousand tons of stores at Havre; also fifteen thousand men and fifteen hundred horses, besides eight hundred tons of hay at Rouen, all awaiting transfer to St. Nazaire. By the 30th of August the Inspector-General of Communications, Major-General Robb, had telegraphed his requirements in tonnage to Southampton; and on the 1st September the transports for the troops were ordered to Havre. By the 3rd September all stores had been cleared from Rouen, and all troops from Havre; and by the 5th every pound of stores had been removed from Havre. In fact, in these four days twenty thousand officers and men, seven thousand horses and sixty thousand tons of stores had been shipped from Havre to St. Nazaire, a very considerable feat of organization. 1-5 Sept. 1914.

A mere comparison of dates, however, will show that, despite this great effort, some days were bound to elapse before the gigantic mass of stores could be landed, the new base thoroughly organized, and all arrangements working smoothly for the despatch of what was needed to the front by a longer line of communication. The arrival of the first reinforcements on the 4th and 5th September was only secured by extraordinary exertions; and it was obvious that the II. Corps must enter upon the new operations with its ranks still much depleted, and lacking one-third of its divisional artillery.

[1] The L. of C. ran from St. Nazaire by two railway routes—one via Saumur and the other by Le Mans—to Villeneuve St. Georges, just south-east of Paris, whence there was one route to a varying railhead.

## Operations of the German *First* and *Second Armies*, 3rd-5th September 1914

Sketch 5. Maps 2, 4, 20, 21 & 22.

On the 28th August, it will be recalled,[1] the German Supreme Command (O.H.L.) had ordered the *Second Army* to march on Paris, and the *First Army* on the lower Seine, on the supposition that at least the French centre and left were in full retreat on the capital.[2] After the battle of Guise (29th-30th August) both von Kluck and von Bülow had departed from these orders: the former turned south-eastwards to help von Bülow who, instead of marching on Paris, was preparing to follow the French Fifth Army due south.

Approval of this change had been given by O.H.L. late on the 30th, but it was not until the night of the 2nd/3rd September that further orders, embodying a new plan, evidently founded on the optimistic reports received from the Armies, were issued by O.H.L. in the form of a message to the *First* and *Second Armies*. This ran:—

"The French are to be forced away from Paris in a south-
" easterly direction.

"The *First Army* will follow in echelon behind the *Second*
" *Army*, and will be responsible henceforward for the flank
" protection of the force.

" The appearance of some of our cavalry before Paris, as
" well as the destruction of all roads leading to Paris is desired."

These orders placed von Kluck in an unpleasant dilemma;[3] the *Second Army* was "a heavy day's march behind the mass of the *First Army*." To march back a day to get into the echelon position ordered would have made it impossible to drive the French south-eastwards, an operation which the *First Army* had initiated and alone was at the moment in a position to attempt. For it to mark time for two days was even further out of the question; the success that O.H.L. hoped for could not be achieved if it stood still. Von Kluck, therefore, considered that he could best carry out the spirit of the orders if he detailed

[1] See p. 222.

[2] It may however have been in pursuance of von Schlieffen's plan drawn up in 1905. According to this, part of the *Second Army* reinforced by *Ersatz* divisions was to invest Paris, whilst the *First Army* passing round the capital was then to move east and envelop the French Armies or drive them towards Switzerland. Sufficient forces for this scheme were however no longer available.

[3] See Kluck, p. 85 *et seq.*

the *IV. Reserve Corps* and a cavalry division for the flank protection against Paris, and moved forward with the rest of his Army across the Marne to drive the French south-eastwards. He kept a second corps, the *II.*, in echelon behind his right as further cover against Paris, and informed O.H.L. that "the proposed driving of the enemy "from Paris in a south-easterly direction could only be "carried out by the advance of the *First Army*." On the evening of the 3rd he issued orders to his corps in accordance with his own views. They began :— 3-4 Sept. 1914.

"The *First Army* will continue its advance over the Marne "to-morrow in order to drive the French south-eastwards.
"If any British are met with, they are to be driven back."[1]

The importance attached to the flank guard is indicated by the fact that it was formed only of a Reserve corps, short of a brigade left behind at Brussels, and the *4th Cavalry Division*, which had been cut up at Néry.

On the 4th September, therefore, von Kluck continued his march south-south-east between the Marne and the Petit Morin, whilst von Bülow crossed the Marne and advanced a short way south of it "without important fighting." At 7.30 P.M. von Kluck, still under the impression that his principal task was to drive the Allies south-eastwards from Paris, and as usual quite in the dark as to the whereabouts of the B.E.F., issued the following orders for next day :—

"The *First Army* will continue its advance against the Seine "with protection towards Paris. Should the British be caught "up anywhere they will be attacked."

His corps were directed to cross the Grand Morin, and reach : the *IX.* Esternay, the *III.* Sancy ; the *IV.* Choisy : even the *II. Corps* was to cross the Marne and reach the Grand Morin below Coulommiers ; the *IV. Reserve Corps* with the *4th Cavalry Division* was to come further southwards, to the north of Meaux, and the *II. Cavalry Corps* to go forward to Provins.[2]

In consequence of the *Third Army* being somewhat in rear of its place in the line south and south-east of Rheims, von Bülow ordered for the 5th only a short march to Montmirail—Vertus for the *Second Army*.

During the afternoon of the 4th September, the true situation—that the Allies were by no means beaten and that the French were preparing to envelop the German

[1] Kluck, p. 91.

[2] Kluck, pp. 93, 94.

right instead of submitting to being enveloped—dawned on O.H.L.

How von Moltke felt is recorded by Herr Helfferich, the Foreign Secretary. On the evening of the 4th September, he says :—

" I found Generaloberst von Moltke by no means in " a cheerful mood inspired by victory, he was serious " and depressed. He confirmed that our advanced troops " were only thirty miles from Paris [the Kaiser had just " announced this triumphantly to Helfferich], ' but,' he " added, ' we've hardly a horse in the army that can go " ' out of a walk.' After a short pause, he continued : " ' We must not deceive ourselves. We have had suc- " ' cesses, but we have not yet had victory. Victory " ' means annihilation of the enemy's power of resistance. " ' When armies of millions of men are opposed, the " ' victor has prisoners. Where are ours ? There were " ' some 20,000 taken in the Lorraine fighting, another " ' 10,000 here and perhaps another 10,000 there. Besides, " ' the relatively small number of captured guns shows " ' me that the French have withdrawn in good order and " ' according to plan. The hardest work is still to be " ' done.' " [1]

At 6.45 P.M. the Supreme Command issued the following Memorandum and orders to all Armies. They appear of sufficient importance to quote *in extenso*.[2] The substance was sent out by wireless, and reached the *First* and *Second Armies* about 6 A.M. on the 5th ; the originals were carried by officers in motor cars, who did not arrive until " evening."

" *4th September—7.45 p.m.* [*German time*]

" To all Armies

" The enemy has evaded the enveloping attack of the " *First* and *Second Armies*, and a part of his forces has joined " up with those about Paris. From reports and other in- " formation, it appears that the enemy is moving troops " westwards from the front Toul—Belfort, and is also taking " them from the front of the *Third*, *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies*. " The attempt to force the whole French Army back in a " south-easterly direction towards the Swiss frontier is thus

[1] " Der Weltkrieg," vol. ii. pp. 17, 18.

[2] Their probable meaning is discussed on page 301. See also footnote 3, p. 300.

" rendered impracticable, and the new situation to be ap- 4 Sept.
" preciated shows that the enemy is bringing up new formations 1914.
" and concentrating superior forces in the neighbourhood of
" Paris, to protect the capital and to threaten the right flank
" of the German Army.

" The *First* and *Second Armies* must therefore remain facing
" the east front of Paris. Their task is to act against any
" operations of the enemy from the neighbourhood of Paris
" and to give each other mutual support to this end.

" The *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies* are still operating against
" superior forces. They must maintain constant pressure to
" force them south-eastwards, and by this means open a
" passage for the *Sixth Army* over the Moselle between Toul
" and Epinal. Whether by co-operating with the *Sixth* and
" *Seventh Armies* they will then succeed in forcing any con-
" siderable part of the enemy's forces towards Swiss territory
" cannot yet be foreseen.

" The *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies* will continue to hold the
" enemy in position on their front, but will take the offensive
" as soon as possible against the line of the Moselle between
" Toul and Epinal, securing their flanks against these fortresses.

" The *Third Army* will march in the direction Troyes—
" Vendeuvre [that is south]. It will be employed, as the
" situation demands, either to the west to support the crossing
" of the *First* and *Second Armies* over the Seine, or to the south
" and south-east to co-operate in the fighting of our armies
" on the left wing.

" His Majesty therefore orders :

" (1) The *First* and *Second Armies* will remain facing the
" eastern front of Paris, to act offensively against any opera-
" tions of the enemy from Paris. The *First Army* will be
" between the Oise and the Marne, the *Second Army* between
" the Marne and the Seine. *II. Cavalry Corps* will be with
" the *First Army*. *I. Cavalry Corps* with the *Second Army*.

" (2) The *Third Army* will advance on Troyes—Vendeuvre.

" (3) The *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies*, by a determined advance
" in a south-easterly direction, will open a passage across the
" Upper Moselle for the *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies*. The right
" wing of the *Fourth Army* will move through Vitry (on the
" Marne, 45 miles south-east of Rheims), and the right wing
" of the *Fifth Army* will move through Revigny (20 miles
" E.N.E. of Vitry). The *IV. Cavalry Corps* will operate in
" front of the *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies*.

" (4) The task of the *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies* remains
" unchanged." [1] Von Moltke.

[1] Next day, it may be added, von Moltke began withdrawing the *XV. Corps* and *7th Cavalry Division* from the left, to be railed through Belgium to reinforce the right.

The orders to the *First* and *Second Armies*, it will be observed, clearly intended emphasis to be laid on their remaining facing Paris and not attacking unless the enemy moved against them, for, in accordance with German principles, every commander would act offensively if within reach of the enemy.

Von Bülow took immediate steps to obey O.H.L. orders literally. He stopped the advance of his Army, and wheeled the left wing slightly forward, so as to begin changing the front gradually from south to west, in expectation that the *First Army* would conform.[1]

The staff of the *First Army*, however, was puzzled by the orders, for the position of the troops in detail had been reported by wireless to O.H.L.; and the Army could not "remain" between Oise and Marne, for the greater part of it had crossed the Marne. If there was danger brewing for the right flank in consequence of further transfers of troops to Maunoury, von Kluck considered the best method of conjuring it was to attack all along the line. After receipt of the wireless summary of the orders, he therefore sent the following message to O.H.L. :—[2]

"*First Army* in compliance with previous instructions of "O.H.L. is advancing via Rebais—Montmirail against the Seine. "Two corps cover it towards Paris, on either side of the Marne. "At Coulommiers there is contact with about three English "divisions, at Montmirail with the west flank of the French. "The latter are offering lively resistance with rear guards, "and should suffer very considerably if pursuit is continued "to the Seine. They have hitherto only been driven back "frontally and are noways beaten out of the field. Their "retreat is directed on Nogent sur Seine. If the investment "of Paris that has been ordered is carried out, the enemy "would be free to manœuvre towards Troyes. The strong "forces suspected in Paris are only in the act of assembly. "Parts of the Field Army will no doubt be sent there, but this "will require time. Consider breaking contact with the "thoroughly battle-fit Field Army and shifting of the *First* "and *Second Armies* is undesirable. I propose instead :— "pursuit to be continued to the Seine and then investment "of Paris."

The *First Army*, notwithstanding this proposal, began to make preparations to obey O.H.L. orders, but it was practically impossible to get new instructions to the corps in time to stop the marches in progress. The *IV. Reserve*

[1] Bülow, p. 52.
[2] Kuhl's "Marne," p. 128 *et seq.* The time is not given.

*Corps*, close at hand, was directed to halt where it happened to be on receipt of the message; as this did not reach it until 11 A.M., it had already completed its march for the day. To the *II. Cavalry Corps* instructions were sent by wireless not to get out of touch of the Army Headquarters by advancing further south. As there was no signal communication with the other corps and the officers to receive orders were due at 11 A.M. in Rebais, no instructions were sent out to them. It was decided that orders for the new situation should be issued in the evening. 5 Sept. 1914.

During the day reports showed that the Allies were retreating on the whole front from Montmirail to Coulommiers and "there was no sign of danger to the right flank north of the Marne." Towards evening Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch arrived from O.H.L. to explain the situation, and another officer brought the written copy of the morning wireless orders. Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch stated that the general situation was dubious (*misslich*). The left wing was held up before Nancy—Epinal, and, in spite of heavy losses, could not get on. The *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies* were only making slow progress. Apparently transfers of troops were being made from the French right wing in the direction of Paris. "It was reported that further "British troops were about to land, perhaps at Ostend. "Assistance to Antwerp by the British was probable." When Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch was informed of the preparations that had been made to stop the advance, he said "that they corresponded to the wishes of O.H.L., "and that the movement could be made at leisure; no "special haste was necessary."[1]

Thus, on the afternoon of the 5th September, four corps of the German *First Army* were across the Grand Morin with two cavalry divisions ahead of them, but with only a weak flank guard behind the western flank. The Army was thus well inside the angle formed by the fronts of the French Fifth Army and the British Expeditionary Force with that of the French Sixth Army. Von Kluck's orders for the 6th were not issued from Rebais until 10 P.M. They will be

[1] Kuhl's "Marne," p. 128. These remarks, it is stated by von Kuhl, were made in the presence of a witness, Lieut.-Colonel Grautoff, the senior General Staff officer of the *First Army*. In judging of the proceedings, von Kuhl points out that it should be borne in mind that "Neither O.H.L. nor "the *First Army* staff had the remotest idea that an immediate offensive "of the whole French army was imminent. The continuation of the "French retreat was accepted as certain. . . . Not a sign, not a word from "prisoners, not a newspaper paragraph gave warning."

given after the British operations for that day have been described. There was a collision between the flank guard and the French Sixth Army near St. Soupplets (7 miles N.N.W. of Meaux) on the afternoon of the 5th; but news of this did not reach von Kluck until "late at night long after his orders had gone out,"[1] and did not therefore affect his decision.

[1] Kuhl's "Marne," p. 133. According to Kluck, p. 98, hostile forces had been reported near Dammartin and St. Mard on the 4th September, and General von Gronau, commanding the *IV. Reserve Corps*, attacked on the 5th to clear up the situation.

# CHAPTER XIV

## THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

### 6TH SEPTEMBER: THE RETURN TO THE OFFENSIVE

(See Sketches 2, 5, 6 & 7;
Maps 2, 4, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 & 29)

IN the early morning of the 5th, at 3 A.M., a copy of General Joffre's "Instruction" for an offensive on the 6th was brought to British G.H.Q. by a representative of French General Headquarters. Some inkling of what this might contain had already reached Sir John French, for two of his staff officers had seen General Franchet d'Esperey at his headquarters on the afternoon of the 4th, and to them that commander had explained the plan of a proposed attack, which was practically the same as that now ordered. During the 5th, General Maunoury, and later General Joffre, visited the Field-Marshal; the situation was fully discussed, and all arrangements were made to begin the attack all along the line next day. Sketch 5. Maps 4, 22 & 23.

It was significant that General Joffre's instructions for the offensive [1] dealt first with the Armies of the left. Their general purport was that the two centre Armies should hold on whilst the three Armies on the left (including the British Army), and the Third Army on the right, attacked the flanks of the German forces which were endeavouring to push forward between Verdun and Paris. On the extreme left, the Sixth Army, with the I. Cavalry Corps, was to cross the Ourcq north-east of Meaux, between Lizy sur Ourcq and May en Multien (4 miles north of Lizy), and attack eastwards in the direction of Chateau Thierry. (Owing to the progress of the enemy, these orders were subsequently altered to an advance on Meaux.) The British Army, facing east, was to attack from the front Changis (7 miles east of Meaux)—Coulommiers in the general direction of Montmirail, the French II. Cavalry Corps ensuring connec-

[1] See Appendices 32 and 33 where they are given *in extenso*.

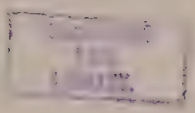
tion between it and the Fifth Army. The Fifth Army (General Franchet d'Esperey) was to attack northwards. In the centre, the Ninth Army (General Foch) was to cover the right of the Fifth Army, by holding the southern exits of the passages over the St. Gond marshes (the gathering ground of the Petit Morin), but with part of its forces on the plateau west of the marshes. On the right, the Fourth (de Langle de Cary) and Third (Sarrail) Armies were to act in conjunction, the former holding the enemy whilst the latter was to attack westwards against the flank of the Germans advancing along the eastern edge of the Argonne.

Unfortunately, these orders not having reached Sir John French's headquarters until the early morning of the 5th, the British Army acted on General Joffre's previous instructions, and starting early—the II. Corps before midnight and the I. and III. Corps before daybreak,—continued to retire as already related during the early part of the day. Thus on the night of the 5th it was 12 to 15 miles in rear of the position in which the French Commander-in-Chief expected it to be.

The ground over which the British Army was about to advance forms part of the great plateau, east and north-east of Paris, whose eastern edge, roughly indicated by Craonne —Rheims—Epernay—Nogent sur Seine, is 400 to 500 feet above the plain of Champagne. It is a country of great open spaces; highly cultivated, dotted with woods and villages, but with no great forests except those of Crécy, Armainvillers and Malvoisine, all south of Coulommiers. It is cut into from east to west by the deep valleys, almost ravines, of the Grand Morin, the Petit Morin, the Marne, the upper course of the Ourcq, the Vesle, the Aisne and the Ailette. These rivers are passable only at the bridges or by bridging, and form ideal lines on which to fight delaying actions. Otherwise, the region on the east of the line Soissons—Meaux presents no definite positions.

Sir John French's operation orders issued at 5.15 P.M. on the 5th September directed the Army to advance eastward with a view to attacking, and, as a preliminary, to wheel to the east pivoting on its right, so that it would come on to the line—roughly parallel to the Grand Morin and 7 miles from it—La Chapelle Iger (south-east of Rozoy)—Villeneuve le Comte—Bailly (5 miles south-west of Crécy).[1]

[1] Sir John French's operation orders and the operation orders of the Cavalry Division and the I., II. and III. Corps will be found in Appendices 34 to 38.



## OPERATIONS, 6-13 SEPTEMBER, 1914.

*Advance of B.E.F.*

*Positions at night are shown by dates.*

This movement was to be completed by the right wing by 9 A.M. and the left by 10 A.M. The Cavalry Division, and the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades acting together under General Gough,[1] were to cover the front and flanks of the force, and connect with the French Armies between which the British were moving. 6 Sept. 1914.

Pezarches, 5 miles to the north of Rozoy, the 1st Division's halting-place on the 5th, was reached about 7 A.M. by General Gough without opposition, and thence patrols were pushed out northwards towards the Forest of Malvoisine, north-eastwards upon Mauperthuis and eastwards upon Touquin. At all these points and also in the Forest of Crécy touch was gained with the enemy; and the advanced parties of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade on the right flank, pressing on to Pécy (5 miles south-east of Rozoy), found themselves in the presence of formidable forces. Large masses of German cavalry could be seen moving southwards upon Jouy le Chatel (east of Pécy),[2] but heavy hostile columns observed on the road north of Pécy, suddenly and without assignable cause, turned about while still two miles distant, and counter-marched to the north.[3]

This happened between 8 and 9 A.M.; but immediately afterwards the German cavalry and artillery became aggressive on the right flank. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade was shelled out of Pécy and compelled to retire for a short distance until the rest of the division could come up. The leading regiment of the 5th Cavalry Brigade, somewhat later, was forced back from Touquin, then shelled out of Pezarches and finally, having no guns in support, was driven back to Rigny (1 mile south-west of Pezarches). As it retired German battalions [4] were seen moving westward from Vaudoy towards Rozoy; this column, which had been sighted by the Flying Corps earlier in the morning, was described by the observers as being of the strength of

[1] Henceforward, until officially designated the 2nd Cavalry Division on the 16th September, the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades acted together under the command of Brig.-General Hubert Gough, and the Cavalry Division contained the 1st, 2nd and 4th Cavalry Brigades. Brig.-General J. Vaughan succeeded General Gough in command of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade.

[2] The German *II. Cavalry Corps* had orders to demonstrate towards Lumigny—Rozoy to cover the withdrawal of the right of the German *First Army*.

[3] This was part of the German *IV. Corps*.

[4] If von Kluck's map is correct, these must have been *Jäger*. There were four battalions, Nos. 3, 4, 9, 10, with the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* ("Militär Wochenblatt," No. 11, 1920). According to Kluck, pp. 152-3, the *3rd* and *4th Jäger* were carried in motor lorries.

Sketch 6. Map 23.

a brigade, with a brigade of artillery attached to it. The leading troops of the I. Corps, the advanced guard of the 1st (Guards) Brigade, found themselves checked when no more than two miles east of Rozoy by this party of the enemy; and, the II. Corps being still near La Houssaye (6 miles north-west of Rozoy), 5 miles in rear of the I., General Haig felt uneasy about his left, overshadowed as it was by the great forests of Crécy and Malvoisine, which could easily conceal large numbers of the enemy. He therefore directed the 1st Division to halt, and its advanced guard to take up a covering position. On receiving Haig's report of this action, the Commander-in-Chief sent orders to the II. Corps to close in on the I. to Lumigny (4 miles north of Rozoy).

West of the I. Corps, the II. and III. Corps had marched north-eastward at 5 A.M. and 3 A.M., respectively, to a line running from Crévecœur (4 miles W.N.W. of Pezarches), north-westward through Villeneuve le Comte to Serris (6 miles west of Crécy). Both corps reached this destination in the forenoon, without molestation; for, though hostile patrols were encountered as the columns moved through the Forest of Crécy, the main body of the Germans, estimated at a cavalry division, retired at once. Shortly after 11 A.M., however, the II. Corps as already mentioned, and also the III. Corps, received the Commander-in-Chief's orders to close in to the left of the I. Corps; and between 1 and 1.30 P.M. they resumed their march in the new direction. By 3 P.M. their approach had cleared the enemy from the left flank of the I. Corps; and shortly afterwards the 1st Division, again advancing upon Vaudoy, found that the Germans had evacuated their positions and retreated northward. The enemy had, in fact, upon this day reached the extreme limit of his advance, and by 6 P.M. the Flying Corps reported that there were no important bodies south of the Petit Morin except at Rebais.

At 3.30 P.M. Sir John French issued orders by telegraph for the I. Corps to advance to a line just short of the Grand Morin, from Marolles (4 miles E.S.E. of Coulommiers) to Les Parichets (1 mile south-west of Coulommiers); for the II. Corps to come up to west of it from Les Parichets to Mortcerf (5 miles south of Crécy); and for the III. Corps to move up into the loop of the Grand Morin southwestward of Crécy, between Tigeaux (2½ miles south of Crécy) and Villiers sur Morin (2½ miles north-west of Tigeaux). The Cavalry Division was to advance north-

east to the line Choisy — Chevru (4 miles and 6 miles south-west of La Ferté Gaucher), and cover the right flank; and Gough's cavalry brigades were sent in rear of the left of the I. Corps. But by the time that these orders reached the I. Corps, it was too late for it to make more than a short move to the line Vaudoy—Touquin—Pezarches, 8 miles short of its intended destination, where it halted at 6.30 P.M. In the II. Corps, however, the head of the 3rd Division reached Faremoutiers: whence, after a few skirmishes with the German piquets, the 1st Wiltshire of the 7th Infantry Brigade, at 11 P.M., forced the passage of the Grand Morin and seized the heights of Le Charnois, about a mile north of the river. The other divisions of the II. and III. Corps also got to their places. The final positions taken up for the night were as follows, the heads of the II. and III. Corps being up to the Grand Morin and the I. Corps and cavalry echeloned to the right rear:— 6 Sept. 1914.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cavalry Division | . Jouy le Chatel. | Sketch 6. Maps 4 & 23. |
| I. Corps | . Vaudoy—Touquin—Pezarches. | |
| Gough's Cavalry Brigades | . Pezarches—Lumigny. | |
| II. Corps: | | |
| 3rd Division | . Lumigny northward to Faremoutiers. | |
| 5th Division | . Mortcerf northward to La Celle sur Morin (1½ miles west of Faremoutiers). | |
| III. Corps | . Villiers sur Morin southward to Villeneuve le Comte and Villeneuve St. Denis. | |

The intelligence gathered during the day was that the *III.* and *IX. German Corps*, with the *Guard Cavalry Division* on their western flank, were opposing the French Fifth Army south of the Grand Morin on the line Esternay—Montceaux—Couperdriz (5 miles W.S.W. of Montceaux). Echeloned to the west in second line between the Grand and Petit Morin were part of the German *IV. Corps* at Rebais, with the *5th Cavalry Division* in front of it north of Marolles, and the *X. Reserve Corps* (as was conjectured) west of Montmirail. The *II. Corps* and *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* were opposite the British; and the remainder of the *IV. Corps*, the *IV. Reserve Corps* and the *4th Cavalry Division* opposite the French Sixth Army. The operations had also established the fact that the units of the *II. Corps* which had been engaged with the British left

during the day, had withdrawn across the Grand Morin. The *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* were at nightfall north-east of Crécy and moving to cross the Marne a little east of Meaux. Both the Fifth and Sixth French Armies were reported to have pressed the enemy back; but their situation was still so imperfectly known that at 7 P.M. Sir John French issued no orders for the 7th September except a Special Order of the Day[1] and a warning that all the troops should be ready to move at short notice any time after 8 A.M. By evening practically all the "First reinforcements" for the British Army had arrived from the Base.

### 7TH SEPTEMBER: THE MARCH TO THE GRAND MORIN

Sketch 6. Maps 4, 23 & 24.

Owing to delay in transit, the instructions from General Joffre to push on, giving information that the Sixth Army had been successful, did not reach G.H.Q. at Melun till 11 A.M. on the 7th. But the British cavalry was early on the move; the Cavalry Division on the right pushed eastward to the Grand Morin, upon Leudon ($3\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of La Ferté Gaucher) and Choisy, and the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades on its left, northward upon Chailly and Coulommiers. The advanced parties of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade found that the Germans had left Mauperthuis (3 miles south of the Grand Morin) just as they themselves entered it, and overtook a few stragglers a mile further on, who were driven towards the river under effective fire from E Battery R.H.A. The enemy seemed to be withdrawing his covering troops northward. The 4th Cavalry Brigade, advancing further east, came upon cavalry, cyclists and guns south of Dagny (2 miles south-west of Choisy), and forced them back north and east across the front of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade; and the 9th Lancers, who were at the head of the latter brigade, thereupon pushed on to the hamlet of Moncel, a mile and a half to the south-east of Dagny, which was held by the enemy. A German patrol was driven out, and it was then occupied by a squadron of the 9th. A troop of the 9th was sent northward to protect the left flank of this squadron; another troop, with Lieut.-Colonel D. G. M. Campbell and the headquarters of the regiment, halted at the northern outskirts of the village, and the machine-gun section was posted in an orchard to the west of it. A patrol presently reported the advance of a German squadron, one hundred and twenty strong, which came up

[1] Appendix 39.

at a canter in one rank towards Colonel Campbell's party. Unfortunately the machine gun jammed immediately ;[1] but Colonel Campbell with about thirty men charged at once at top speed. The Germans did not increase their pace to meet the shock and were completely overwhelmed, as far as the narrow front of the 9th Lancers extended. Colonel Campbell was wounded, but the survivors were rallied and led back into Moncel ; the Germans, fearing a trap, did not follow. Further to the right, a squadron of the 18th Hussars working its way forward on foot was charged just beyond Faujus (2½ miles south of Choisy) by a weak German squadron,[2] which it practically annihilated by rapid fire at two hundred yards' range. Sixty-three of the *1st Guard Dragoons* were killed or wounded in this affair, and only three escaped ; the 18th Hussars had only two of their led horses slightly wounded. 7 Sept. 1914.

To the west of the cavalry, the Wiltshire, in their advanced position across the Grand Morin near Le Charnois (4 miles west of Coulommiers), were attacked at 6 A.M. by some two hundred dismounted men of the *Guard Cavalry Division*, whom they beat off without any difficulty. The 2/South Lancashire, also, making their way forward to cover the right of the Wiltshire, were engaged by the enemy in the woodlands and suffered some loss. Cyclist patrols of the III. Corps ascertained that by 7 A.M. the ground within a radius of 3 miles north and north-west of Crécy on the Grand Morin was clear. Aerial reconnaissances confirmed the general impression that the enemy was withdrawing northward, though there were still considerable bodies both of cavalry and infantry just north of the Grand Morin beyond La Ferté Gaucher.

Acting upon this information the Field-Marshal issued orders at 8 A.M. for the Army to continue its advance north-eastward across the river in the general direction of Rebais. The corps were to march upon as close a front as the roads would permit, and on reaching the line Dagny—Coulommiers—Maisoncelles (6 miles north-west of Coulommiers), heads of columns were to halt and await further orders. Meanwhile, the Cavalry Division moved northward, making good the course of the Grand Morin as far east as La Ferté

[1] The German account in Vogel is that the gun was spotted, and that a sergeant and six men galloped up, drove off the gun crew and damaged the mechanism with a stone ; otherwise the two accounts agree. The attackers were Rittmeister von Gayling's (2nd) squadron, *1st Guard Dragoons*.

[2] Two-thirds of the 4th Squadron, *1st Guard Dragoons* ("Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 99).

Gaucher; it met nothing but a few patrols, but ascertained that a German cavalry brigade and a battery had re-crossed the Grand Morin at 3 P.M. The 5th and 3rd Cavalry Brigades also pushed northward, the former on Rebais, the latter on Coulommiers. The 3rd met with some little resistance at the bridges over the Grand Morin just east of Coulommiers, and its guns came into action to silence some German artillery on the north bank of the stream, and to shell retiring parties of the enemy. This caused some delay, but the brigade was able to pursue its way 4 miles towards Doue, where it was checked by infantry and machine guns. The 5th Cavalry Brigade, with little hindrance, between 5 and 6 P.M. reached Rebais, whence the German rear parties retired leaving a few prisoners in the hands of the British.

Behind the cavalry screen, the infantry continued its march without serious incident; and there was cheering evidence of the enemy's demoralization. The country near the roads was littered with empty bottles; and the inhabitants reported much drunkenness among the Germans. Indeed, some British artillery drivers while cutting hay discovered German soldiers, helplessly drunk, concealed under the topmost layer of the stack. The arrival of the "First reinforcements" had also tended to raise the spirits of the men.

Sketch 6. Map 24. The positions taken up by the Army for the night of the 7th beyond and along the Grand Morin were as follows:—

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|---|---|
| 5th and 3rd Cavalry Brigades, and 4th (Guards) Brigade | North of the Grand Morin on the west side of Rebais. |
| Cavalry Division . . . | South of the Grand Morin at Choisy, Feraubry. |
| 3rd Infantry Brigade . . | La Bochetière (1½ miles south-east of Choisy). |
| I. Corps (less 3rd and 4th Brigades) | South of the Grand Morin from Jouy sur Morin to St. Siméon. |
| II. Corps . . . . . | North of the Grand Morin from Chauffry to Coulommiers. |
| III. Corps . . . . . | North of the Grand Morin from Giremoutiers to La Haute Maison. |

Maps 4 & 24. Throughout this day the Fifth and Sixth French Armies continued to make good progress. By evening General Franchet d'Esperey, with three out of his four

corps across the Grand Morin, had reached the line from Charleville (7 miles south-east of Montmirail) to La Ferté Gaucher; while General Maunoury, having advanced to the line Penchard—Étrepilly—Betz, some five miles west of the Ourcq, was able to report that German artillery was retiring to the western bank of that river.[1] Aerial reconnaissance indicated that von Kluck was withdrawing two of his corps (*II.* and *IV.*) with all haste northward; and, from identifications by contact during the day and the fact that two German cavalry divisions had been seen between 5.15 and 6.30 P.M. moving into bivouac at Orly (3½ miles north and a little west of Rebais), with yet more cavalry passing northward to the east of them, it seemed as if the enemy was trusting to the *I.* and *II. Cavalry Corps*[2] to hold the British in check during a change of dispositions. But the Marne lay in the way of any German movement northward, and the congestion reported at the bridge of La Ferté sous Jouarre was such as to offer good results from a rapid advance towards that point. It was also reported, however, that a considerable force of the enemy lay at Pierre Levée (5 miles south-west of the bridge) to guard against any such attempt.[3] Indeed, the left of the British III. Corps had not been allowed to take up its position between Maisoncelles and La Haute Maison, some two or three miles only from Pierre Levée, without being shelled. The 8th September, therefore, promised to be an important day. 7 Sept. 1914.

General Joffre's General Order No. 7, issued at 5.20 P.M. on the 7th September, directed the Armies on the left to follow the enemy with the bulk of their forces, but in such a manner as always to retain the possibility of enveloping the German right wing. For this purpose, the French Sixth Army was to gain ground gradually towards the north on the right bank of the Ourcq; the British forces were to endeavour to get a footing "in succession (*sic*) across the Petit "Morin, the Grand Morin and the Marne"; the Fifth Army was to accentuate the movement of its left wing, and with its right support the Ninth Army. The road Sablonnières

[1] The fighting on the western flank during the battle of the Marne between the French Sixth Army and the German *First Army* is known as the "Battle of the Ourcq."

[2] It is again recalled that each of these cavalry corps contained at least five infantry (*Jäger*) battalions besides cyclist companies and machine-gun companies. (See Appendix 7.)

[3] Four *Jäger* battalions and a cavalry brigade according to Kuhl's "Marne," p. 207.

—Nogent l'Artaud—Chateau Thierry, allotted to the British, was made the boundary between them and the Fifth Army.

Accordingly, on the evening of the 7th September, the Field-Marshal issued orders [1] for the advance to be continued against the line of the Marne from Nogent l'Artaud to La Ferté sous Jouarre: the cavalry to push on in pursuit, keeping touch with the French Fifth Army on the right, and with the Sixth Army on the left. The Grand Morin was already behind the British, but before the Marne could be reached, the Petit Morin had to be crossed: a stream running through a narrow valley, with steep, wooded sides, approachable only through close, intricate country, studded with innumerable copses, villages and hamlets, and with only six bridges in the section in question. The Marne itself runs through a valley of similar character, though on a larger scale, so that the ground was all in favour of the enemy's rear guards.

### 8th September: The Forcing of the Petit Morin

Sketch 6. Maps 4, 24 & 25.

The cavalry moved off at 4 A.M. covering the front of the I. and II. Corps. In the Cavalry Division, the 1st and 2nd Brigades made for the line of the Petit Morin from Bellot (due north of La Ferté Gaucher) westward to La Trétoire, with the 4th Cavalry Brigade in support. Gough's 5th and 3rd Cavalry Brigades on its left headed for the river from La Trétoire to St. Cyr. The 5th Dragoon Guards, at the head of the Cavalry Division, moved by La Ferté Gaucher on Sablonnières, a little to the west of Bellot, and driving scattered parties of German horsemen before them, plunged down into the wooded valley of the Petit Morin. The two bridges at Sablonnières were reported to be lightly held, but a direct advance upon them was found to be impossible owing to the enemy's rifle fire; and an attempt to turn the position from the east by way of Bellot was also checked. At the western bridge, to which the approach lay over the railway bridge, the 4th Dragoon Guards of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade tried to carry both by a rush, and secured the first, but were foiled at the river bridge which was barricaded. On their left, 3 miles further westward, a reconnoitring party of the Greys discovered just south of the river, near Gibraltar ($1\frac{1}{4}$ miles S.S.W. of Orly), half a battalion of *Jäger* and a cavalry brigade com-

[1] Appendix 40.

fortably eating their breakfasts. Stealing back unperceived they were able to indicate this target to a section of J Battery at Boisbaudry, which broke up the German picnic abruptly with shrapnel, and sent the enemy fleeing across the valley with considerable loss. German artillery, however, forbade any further advance of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, and the 5th was likewise brought to a standstill. On the left of it again, the 5th Lancers of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade penetrated into St. Cyr, and D Battery did some execution among the Germans retreating before them. But very soon the enemy counter-attacked, drove the 5th Lancers out of St. Cyr, and stopped further progress by a heavy crossfire of artillery from the high ground above Orly (opposite Gibraltar). D and E Batteries, being in an exposed position, were for the time out of action, for their teams could not come up to shift them, and the detachments were obliged to leave their guns and take cover. By about 8.30 A.M. the whole of the British cavalry was at a standstill, the hostile rear guards being too strong and too well posted to be dislodged until further forces arrived. 8 Sept. 1914.

On the extreme left, infantry of the 4th Division ascertained between 3 and 4 A.M. that the enemy had evacuated Pierre Levée, which defended the approaches to La Ferté sous Jouarre; and at 6 A.M. the 12th and 19th Infantry Brigades advanced, the former upon Jouarre, the latter on its left upon Signy Signets. Aerial reconnaissances about this hour reported a great number of the enemy massed about La Ferté sous Jouarre, waiting their turn to cross the river, whilst the passage of infantry over the bridge was unceasing.[1] But the movement of the British was necessarily slow, for there were many copses and coverts to be cleared in front, and a large belt of wood—the Bois de Jouarre—on the right flank. No serious opposition however was encountered until about 11 A.M., when the leading battalion of the 19th Infantry Brigade had passed beyond Signy Signets and reached the ridge overlooking the Marne, where it was caught by artillery fire from the heights just north-west of La Ferté sous Jouarre. No great damage was done; and the German guns were soon silenced by two batteries of the XXIX. Brigade R.F.A. But the brushing away of the enemy's advanced troops revealed the German main body holding the north bank of the Marne in strength, with a bridgehead, well provided with machine guns, at La

[1] According to the maps in von Kuhl's "Marne," the whole of the *5th Division* passed through La Ferté sous Jouarre on the 8th.

Ferté sous Jouarre.[1] It was thus evident that the passage of the Marne would not be easily forced; and there was nothing for the moment to be done but to bring the artillery forward to knock out the machine guns, and to seek a way round. This was exasperating, for heavy columns of the enemy were still crossing the river at La Ferté, and masses of men were in sight on the northern bank, but out of range.

Meanwhile on the right of the Force, shortly before 9 A.M., the advanced guard of the 1st (Guards) Brigade (the 1/Black Watch and the 117th Battery R.F.A.) reached the edge of the plateau above Bellot, and passed down a narrow defile into the valley of the Petit Morin, German shrapnel bursting over their heads as they marched. The 118th and 119th Batteries unlimbered near the crest of the hill, and soon silenced the German guns. By 9.30 A.M. the Black Watch reached Bellot, where they found French cavalry in possession but unable to advance; pushing through the village, they crossed the river and entered the woods on its north side. They then turned westward upon Sablonnières to facilitate the crossing there, but were stubbornly opposed by dismounted cavalry and the *Guard Jäger*, until the Cameron Highlanders, with dismounted troopers of the 4th Cavalry Brigade, came to their assistance. The advent of the Camerons was decisive; and soon after 1 P.M. the British were masters of Sablonnières and of over sixty German prisoners.[2]

While this was going forward, the 2nd Division, next on the left, headed by the 4th (Guards) Brigade and the XXXVI. and XLI. Brigades R.F.A., had come up to La Trétoire at the edge of the plateau overlooking the Petit Morin, and had been greeted, like the 1st Brigade, with continuous shrapnel fire from batteries on the heights opposite in the vicinity of Boitron. The British guns soon compelled the Germans to move; but skilfully placed machine guns made the advance of infantry across the river valley a very difficult matter; and the 3rd Coldstream tried in vain to make their way down to the water. The Irish Guards were sent to their help, but could make no

[1] According to von Kluck, La Ferté was defended by the *2nd Cavalry Division*, with the *9th* west of it; according to von Altheim's "1ste Garde-Dragoner Regiment im Kriege, 1914–18," the *5th* was at Orly and the *Guard* at Boitron. The retirement to the north of the Marne was ordered by von der Marwitz at 10 A.M. ("Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 102).

[2] According to Vogel, the troops which defended Bellot and Sablonnières were the *Garde-du-korps* and *Garde-Kürassiere regiments* and part of the *Garde-Jäger battalion*.

progress; and both battalions were withdrawn whilst the valley was further searched by artillery. The XLIV. Brigade R.F.A. came into action, and also the 35th Heavy Battery, near La Trétoire. About noon the two battalions again advanced, whilst on their left the 2/Worcestershire, at the head of the 5th Infantry Brigade, moved down on Bécherelle (1¼ miles N.N.W. of La Trétoire), east of which was a bridge; and on their right the 2/Grenadiers and 2/Coldstream on La Forge, where there was another bridge. This attack on a front of nearly a mile and a half was pushed successfully as far as the road which runs parallel with the Petit Morin on its southern bank. The Worcestershire then carried the bridge near Bécherelle, capturing a few prisoners in the farm close to it; and, with the approach of this battalion on his right flank and of the two battalions of Guards on his left, the enemy retired. Thus, before 2 P.M. the passage of the Petit Morin had been forced at the eastern extremity of the line; and the Cavalry Division was able to cross the valley and push northward. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade pursued the hostile guns a short distance, taking some prisoners and inflicting appreciable losses; whilst the 4th Cavalry Brigade, relieving it at 3.30 P.M., struck the flank of a German column seen on its left retiring northward from Orly and did some execution with its guns. 8 Sept. 1914.

The I. Corps was now free to send help further to the west; and not before it was needed. The 8th Infantry Brigade[1] had come up to the support of the 5th Cavalry Brigade about Gibraltar between 9 and 10 A.M., but could make no progress. The enemy was entrenched on the slopes on the north side of the Petit Morin about half a mile west of Orly, and his machine guns were so cunningly hidden that field guns could not find them. It was noon before howitzers could be brought up, but even then the machine guns could not be located, and they rendered a frontal attack impossible. Further west the 13th Infantry Brigade and the 121st Battery had joined the 3rd Cavalry Brigade between 8 and 9 A.M.; and two battalions were deployed for attack on St. Cyr. But the fire from the enemy's concealed batteries was exceedingly trying, and little or no progress was made. Soon after 9 A.M., therefore, the 14th Infantry Brigade, which was halted at Doue, was sent for-

[1] Only about two thousand strong in spite of "first reinforcements," as a result of the heavy losses of the 2/Royal Irish and 4/Middlesex at Mons, and of the 1/Gordons at Le Cateau.

ward to the attack of St. Ouen, a mile east of St. Cyr. The Duke of Cornwall's L.I. and the East Surreys led the way, advancing in open formation for two miles under shrapnel fire till they reached the valley and plunged into the dense wood that shrouded the descent to the river. So steep was the declivity and so thickly tangled the undergrowth, that the Cornishmen, though little opposed, were obliged to work down to the water man by man and re-form by the railway at the foot of the slope. They found before them two seemingly impassable streams, traversed by a single continuous bridge which was swept by two machine guns. After a time, however, a foot-bridge was found over one stream and a ford through the other; and thus the battalion was able gradually to effect its passage. The East Surreys crossed just as slowly by means of a single boat; but Lieut.-Colonel Longley used the time thus afforded to discover the exact position of the enemy's trenches and then attacked them in flank, whilst the Duke of Cornwall's cleared St. Ouen and occupied the village of St. Cyr.

It was now nearly 3 P.M. The river had been crossed on both sides of Orly (2½ miles east of St. Cyr), and the enemy's position at that place became perilous. In the 2nd Division, the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the Connaught Rangers of the 5th Infantry Brigade turned westward from Bécherelle after they had crossed the Petit Morin, and approached Orly from the east. The 4th (Guards) Brigade had pushed on 3 miles from the river to the cross roads about Belle Idée on the Montmirail—La Ferté sous Jouarre main road, almost behind the German position. The 60th Howitzer Battery now began to search the woods with high-explosive shell, with the result that German cavalry and infantry soon emerged from their cover within close range of the Guards at La Belle Idée and were heavily punished; the few that remained in the wood were enveloped by the 3/Coldstream and Irish Guards and shot down or captured. Such fugitives as made their escape were pursued so vigorously by the shells of the British guns that the infantry could not follow up its success. Meanwhile the 8th Infantry Brigade began again to press upon Orly itself from the south, and the 9th Infantry Brigade from the east; and about 4 P.M. the village was captured and one hundred and fifty prisoners[1] with it. Simultaneously, the Cyclist Company of the 5th

[1] *Guard Schützen* and men of the *5th Cavalry Division.*

Division reached the main road, La Ferté sous Jouarre—Montmirail, 3 miles west of the point where the 4th (Guards) Brigade had struck it, and came upon the flank of two hundred German *Guard Schützen*, and after five minutes' fighting compelled them to lay down their arms. Unfortunately, a battery of the 3rd Division which had been pushed forward to north of Orly, peppered both captors and captured so energetically with shrapnel that all but seventy of the prisoners were able to escape. Both divisions however of the II. Corps pressed northward from Orly and St. Ouen as soon as they could, and by dusk the head of the 3rd Division was at Les Feuchères (1½ miles east of Rougeville), and the head of the 5th Division at Rougeville, where they were within less than a mile of the Marne. 8 Sept. 1914.

The reaction of these operations on the right made itself felt about La Ferté sous Jouarre between 3 and 4 P.M. The guns of the 4th Division had come up about noon, and had shelled the bridges at La Ferté and the ground in front of Jouarre very heavily.[1] The 108th Heavy Battery of the 5th Division, unlimbering at Doue (4½ miles S.S.E. of Jouarre) and firing by the map, silenced one troublesome battery near Jouarre and another some distance further east. At 1 P.M. the German fire ceased opposite to the 4th Division; and soon after 2 P.M. orders were issued for the 11th and 19th Infantry Brigades to advance on the bridge at La Ferté over the Petit Morin, and for the 12th Infantry Brigade to move upon that of Courcelles (1 mile north-east of Jouarre) about a mile and a half to the eastward. Courcelles was quickly evacuated by the enemy at the approach of the 2/Essex and 2/Inniskilling Fusiliers, who thereupon moved on to La Ferté, where both bridges were found to have been blown up. These battalions were joined there by the King's Own, who had already cleared Jouarre, and by some of the Welch Fusiliers. The Germans firing from the houses made some show of resistance, but by dark the portion of the town that lies south of the Marne had been cleared of the enemy and was in full occupation of the British.

The day's operations now practically came to an end. Troops of the I. Corps did indeed advance as far as Bassevelle, midway between the Petit Morin and the Marne; but at 6 P.M. a very sultry day ended in a violent thunderstorm

[1] La Ferté sous Jouarre lies in the valley, on the Marne; Jouarre is on the height above it, on the south side of the valley.

with such torrents of rain as made it difficult either to see or to move. Nearly the whole of the 8th had been spent in forcing the passage of the Petit Morin. The ground was ideally suited to a rear-guard action, and the enemy's positions were well chosen, and most skilfully and gallantly defended. It is difficult to say precisely what number of Germans held the river; but it is certain that there was all of von Richthofen's *Cavalry Corps*, and at least half of von der Marwitz's, including seven or more infantry battalions amply supplied with machine guns, and a considerable force of artillery.[1] The total loss of the British was under six hundred killed and wounded, against which were to be set some five hundred Germans captured, at least the same number killed and wounded, and about a dozen machine guns taken in the trenches by the river.[2]

Sketch 6. Map 25. The troops halted for the night, all south of the Marne, in the following positions :—

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division . . . | Replonges. |
| I. Corps . . . . . | Bassevelle, Hondevillers ($2\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of last named), Boitron. |
| II. Corps . . . . . | Les Feuchères, Rougeville, Charnesseuil ($1\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Bussières), Orly. |

[1] The latest account, Baumgarten-Crusius's "Deutsche Heerführung im Marnefeldzug, 1914," p. 118, states : "On 8th September the line of "the Petit Morin was to be held. This was a failure (*misslang*). The "*9th Cavalry Division* was pulled out early to act as battle-cavalry "behind the centre of the Ourcq front, where a break-through was "apparently threatening. The *2nd Cavalry Division* together with rear-"guard battalions of the *II.* and *III. Corps* managed to bar the Marne "for a little time longer. But further to the east the screen was torn "aside. The *I. Cavalry Corps* about midday was thrown back from "the Petit Morin over the Dollau (which enters the Marne from "the south just above Chézy) with considerable loss. The attempt "to stand there failed. The *5th Cavalry Division* withdrew north-"westwards over the Marne (at Nanteuil, according to the sketch), the "*Guard Cavalry Division* eastward on Condé (7 miles south-east of Chateau "Thierry), rear guards on the Dollau. . . . A gap of 21 miles was thus "occasioned between the *First* and *Second Armies*. To close it the "*First Army* detailed Kraewel's brigade, and the *9th Cavalry Division* "was sent back to General von der Marwitz."

A few lines lower down it is mentioned that the *2nd Cavalry Division* had four *Jäger* battalions.

[2] Vogel speaks of "the celebrated heavy-in-losses and important fight at Orly." The *Guard* and *5th Cavalry Divisions* were engaged; "many of the companies of the *Guard Jäger* and *Schützen* came out of action with only 45 men."

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| III. Corps . . . . . | Grand Glairet (1 mile west of Jouarre), Venteuil Chateau (1 mile south of La Ferté sous Jouarre), Signy Signets. | 8 Sept. 1914. |
| 3rd Cavalry Brigade | | |
| 5th Cavalry Brigade . . . | Between Gibraltar and Rebais. | |

The news that came in at nightfall from the French Armies on the right and left was less satisfactory than on the 7th. To the eastward the French Fifth Army had made good progress and had encountered no very serious opposition. On its extreme left the XVIII. Corps had crossed the Petit Morin to L'Épine aux Bois (4 miles west of Montmirail), and the rest of the Army was extended from Montmirail eastward to Champaubert, beyond which General Foch's Ninth Army stretched from St. Prix (3 miles south of Champaubert) to La Fère Champenoise. To the westward the Germans, having been strongly reinforced by the troops withdrawn by von Kluck from the south, were offering a determined resistance to the French on the Ourcq; and General Maunoury, in spite of all efforts, had failed to gain ground. Indeed, his centre had actually been forced back, and he had been obliged to recall the French 8th Division, which should have linked his right to the British Army, from the east to the west bank of the Ourcq. From this information it became evident that the quicker the advance of the British upon the left flank and rear of von Kluck, the speedier would be General Maunoury's deliverance, and the more telling the damage inflicted upon the Germans.[1] Maps 4 & 25.

The Special Instruction No. 19, issued by General Joffre at 8.7 P.M. on the 8th September, drew attention to the fact that the right wing of the German Army was now divided into two groups, connected only by some cavalry divisions, supported, in front of the British troops, by detachments of all arms. It was therefore important to defeat the German extreme right before it could be reinforced by other formations released by the fall of Maubeuge. This task was confided to the Sixth Army and the British. The Sixth Army was to hold on to the troops opposing it on the right bank of the Ourcq, whilst the British forces crossing the Marne between Nogent l'Artaud and La Ferté sous Jouarre were to advance against the left and rear of the enemy on the Ourcq; the Fifth Army was to cover the right flank of the British Army by sending a strong detachment against Chateau Thierry—Azy.

[1] The German account of the day's fighting will be found on p. 296.

## The Passage of the Marne

Maps 4, 25 & 26.

The orders issued by the British Commander-in-Chief on the evening of the 8th September directed the Army to continue its advance northward at 5 A.M., attacking the enemy rear guards wherever met, the cavalry maintaining touch with the French Armies to right and left, as before.[1] It had been expected that the Germans would offer stubborn resistance on the line of the Marne, which, with its steep wooded sides, presented very favourable ground for a rear-guard action; but it was already tolerably evident from the reports of the Flying Corps on the 8th that this was not their intention. Their main bodies were by evening in bivouac between Nanteuil (5 miles north-east of La Ferté sous Jouarre) and Chateau Thierry, and there were signs during the afternoon of troops moving hastily northward from this area. Not even were the bridges destroyed, except those of La Ferté sous Jouarre, Sammeron (2 miles west of La Ferté), and Changis (3 miles west of Sammeron). The 11th Hussars, who had reconnoitred towards the bridge over the Marne at Charly and found it occupied by the enemy on the evening of the 8th, ascertained that the Germans had retired during the night leaving the passage clear.

## 9th September 1914: Operations of the Cavalry and the I. Corps

Maps 4 & 26.

Early on the 9th September therefore the 1st Cavalry Brigade was pushed forward on Nogent and Charly, and by 5.30 A.M. it was in possession of both bridges, whilst the 4th Cavalry Brigade seized that at Azy further to the east and 3 miles below Chateau Thierry. The two brigades then moved about three miles northward from Nogent to Mont de Bonneil to cover the passage of the infantry. By 7.30 A.M. the Queen's, the leading battalion of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, the advanced guard of the 1st Division, had passed the Marne at Nogent and was crowning the heights north of the river. The 6th Infantry Brigade, with the XXXIV. Brigade R.F.A., the advanced guard of the 2nd Division, on reaching Charly found a barricade on the bridge which took three-quarters of an hour to remove. By 8.15 A.M. however it also had secured the high ground north of the river without fighting. By 10.15 A.M. the 3rd

[1] Appendix 41.

Infantry Brigade had pushed on to Beaurepaire Farm ($2\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Charly) without seeing a sign of the enemy. The 1st Cavalry Brigade had already made good the next ridge to the north, and the 3rd Infantry Brigade had advanced about another mile to Les Aulnois Bontemps, when the advanced guards received orders to stand fast. The Flying Corps had reported large hostile forces halted north of Chateau Thierry and others moving westward upon Domptin, just west of the position of the 3rd Infantry Brigade.[1] 9 Sept. 1914.

The whole of the I. Corps was therefore ordered to halt until the situation could be cleared up; and such of the artillery of the 2nd Division as had not crossed the Marne was directed to remain in observation on the south bank of the river, and the 5th Infantry Brigade to entrench there. The rest of the Cavalry Division joined the 1st Cavalry Brigade to the left front of the 3rd Infantry Brigade early in the afternoon, and a few men of the German rear parties were cut off and captured. The remainder of the 1st Division crossed the river at Nogent, and in due time the 2nd Division also, at Charly. But no further advance was made by the I. Corps until 3 P.M., when both divisions moved forward until their heads reached the vicinity of the Chateau Thierry—Montreuil road at Le Thiolet and Coupru respectively. They then halted and billeted in depth along their roads of advance.

### Operations of the II. Corps

The II. Corps found the Marne bridges at Nanteuil and Saacy intact; the 3rd Division crossed by the former, the 5th Division by the latter. Before 9 A.M. the vanguards of both divisions had established themselves on the heights of the northern bank, and the 9th Infantry Brigade, which with a brigade of artillery formed the advanced guard of the 3rd Division, at once sent forward two battalions to Bezu les Guéry, two and a half miles from the river. The vanguard (the Fifth Fusiliers), pushing on for another mile to Ventelet Farm, found the ridge before it clear of the enemy. By 10.30 A.M. Brigadier-General Shaw had fixed his headquarters at Bezu; and all seemed to be Maps 4 & 26.

[1] From an article in the "Militär Wochenblatt," 73/1920, it would appear that the troops near Chateau Thierry were the main body of the *17th Division*, and those moving west the *5th Cavalry Division*, which on the 9th September was at Marigny, 7 miles west of Chateau Thierry.

going well. On the left of the 3rd Division also everything appeared at the outset to promise an easy advance for the 5th Division to Montreuil (2 miles north-west of Bezu, on the Chateau Thierry—La Ferté sous Jouarre main road), at which point it would cut off the Germans who were defending the passage of the Marne about La Ferté. No sooner, however, did the 14th Infantry Brigade show itself about La Limon (1 mile north of Saacy) than it was greeted by heavy shell fire from concealed batteries at various points. The Germans were using against the British the tactics of L Battery and the 119th Battery at Élouges. Harassed by bursting shells on front and flank, the 14th Infantry Brigade, with the 65th (Howitzer) Battery and the 80th Battery, began its advance upon Montreuil. The direct road from Saacy along the bank of the northward bend of the Marne, via Méry, being too much exposed to the German fire, the brigade moved through the woods half a mile to the east, while the batteries unlimbered south of La Limon. The growth of small trees was so dense that it was extremely difficult for the men to keep touch and maintain direction, and consequently progress was slow. In fact the 14th Infantry Brigade was swallowed up by the woods for more than an hour.

Meanwhile about 11 A.M. Brigadier-General Shaw at Bezu, to the east of this attack, observing that the British batteries were unable to silence the German guns opposing the 5th Division, sent two companies of the Lincolnshire to work through the woods west of Bezu and try to capture the German guns upon Pisseloup Ridge (1 mile west of Bezu). The Lincolnshire crept up unseen to within a hundred and fifty yards of them, and in a few minutes shot down the German gunners and their escort literally almost to a man. Dashing out of the thicket to secure the guns, however, they were fired upon by the 65th (Howitzer) Battery, and compelled again to seek cover, with a loss of four officers and some thirty men killed or wounded; and the guns were not captured until next morning. This unfortunate mistake arose from the 65th believing that the German battery had been silenced by some other British artillery, and that the men of the Lincolnshire were German gunners returning to their abandoned guns.

Just about this time—11.30 A.M.—the Cornwall L.I. at the head of the 14th Infantry Brigade at last emerged from the woods, and were fired upon by German infantry in position to the south of Montreuil. Thereupon, the brigade

was ordered to attack towards the north, on a front of two battalions, with the left flank on the road from Méry to Montreuil; while the 15th Infantry Brigade was directed by 5th Division Headquarters to move round further to the east, by Bezu and Bois des Essertis (½ mile north-west of Bezu), and attack Hill 189 (immediately to south-east of Montreuil) from the flank. The 14th Infantry Brigade meanwhile continued its advance, always slowly, owing to the density of the woods; and, on the left, the leading companies of the Duke of Cornwall's losing touch of their supports, came under heavy fire from infantry entrenched on Hill 189 and from two batteries, which were still unsilenced, at La Sablonnière and Chamoust (south-west and north of Montreuil, respectively). Under this crossfire of artillery, the Cornishmen, after struggling for a time to work forward, were compelled to fall back, leaving a few prisoners behind them; and the 14th Infantry Brigade was thus brought to a dead stop. The Germans at 2 P.M. even launched a counter-attack against the left of its line, but the effort was at once smothered by the British shrapnel. After more than an hour of deadlock, the Norfolks and Dorsets of the 15th Infantry Brigade came up between 3 and 4 P.M. to the western edge of the Bois des Essertis, on the flank of Hill 189, where they were abruptly checked by a violent fire from rifles and machine guns and from the battery at La Sablonnière. Unable to make progress, they stood fast, and engaged in a short-range fight with the German infantry, which was entrenched within a hundred and twenty yards of them. Forty-seven dead Germans were found next day in the trenches opposite to the Dorsets; but the 15th Infantry Brigade needed the support of artillery, and the British batteries could find no positions from which to give it. Some time before—about 3 P.M.—two battalions of the 15th Infantry Brigade had been ordered to the left via Moitiébard (2 miles south of Montreuil) to discover and, if possible, destroy the battery at Chamoust; but it was not until 6 P.M. that an officer of artillery, by a personal reconnaissance, at last found the exact position of the German guns. They were silenced within ten minutes by the 37th (Howitzer) Battery; but by that time the light was waning, and the best of the day was gone.[1] 9 Sept. 1914.

[1] The enemy at Montreuil was at first Kraewel's *Composite Brigade*, hastily formed on the evening of the 8th of two infantry regiments and six batteries of artillery from the two divisions of the *IX. Corps*. General Kraewel's instructions were to hold the line of the Marne from Nogent to La Ferté (actually the British front) and destroy the bridges (which

The 3rd Division, when it found that neither the I. Corps on its right nor the 5th Division on its left, was coming up in line with it, after helping the 5th Division as already related, remained from the morning onwards with its head at Ventelet Farm on the Chateau Thierry—Montreuil road. Thus, the road marked the limit of British progress in this quarter.

### Operations of the III. Corps

Maps 4 & 26. Further to the west, the III. Corps was delayed by most effective opposition. The enemy was holding the right bank of the Marne at all likely points of passage, with artillery near Caumont at the top of the big loop of the river enfilading the western reach of it nearly as far as La Ferté sous Jouarre, and with other guns north-west of the town. The only intact bridge was the railway viaduct halfway down the above-mentioned enfiladed reach of the river. The service pontoons and trestles at the disposal of the corps were insufficient to bridge the Marne at any point in this section—for it was from 70 to 90 yards wide and very deep—without the help of additional material, and there was none to be found ready for use except at La Ferté sous Jouarre.

Pursuant to General Pulteney's orders, the 11th and 12th Infantry Brigades advanced at 4.45 A.M. in two columns, with the intention of repairing the bridges in front of them, and if possible of crossing the river and establishing a bridgehead north of La Ferté. They seized the high ground at Tarterel, immediately to the east of La Ferté, so that artillery could be brought up to deal with the German guns and the portion of the town south of the river. The broken bridges at La Ferté were, however, found by the 11th Infantry Brigade to be unapproachable, the buildings adjacent to them on the northern bank

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he did not do), whilst the three cavalry divisions held the Petit Morin (which they had already abandoned). He slipped away at 8 p.m. on the 9th, leaving the guns of one battery behind him ("Militär Wochenblatt," Nos. 73 and 74 of 1920).

In the course of the fight, Kraewel's brigade "was supported by the "*9th Cavalry Division*, which attacked towards Monbertoin, and by the "leading troops of the Prussian *5th Division*, which had been sent by "[*First*] *Army Headquarters* to reinforce it, and had marched via Cocherel." (Lieut.-Colonel Müller Loebnitz, formerly of the Great General Staff, in "Der Wendepunkt des Weltkrieges," p. 35.)

Four *Jäger* battalions and "a detachment of the *3rd Division* from Mary" (6 miles to the west of Montreuil) were also present according to Kuhl's "Marne," p. 207.

of the river being full of German snipers and machine guns. Attempts to cross by boat further down were also unsuccessful. It was extremely difficult to tell which houses were occupied, and impossible to deal effectively with them, except by howitzer fire; and the greater part of the forenoon was occupied with dropping shells on the most likely ones from Tarterel, and from Jouarre, south of La Ferté. Meanwhile, however, the 12th Infantry Brigade pushed two battalions up the left bank of the river into the loop between Chamigny and Luzancy, and these succeeded in driving the Germans from a weir to the west of Luzancy. Then, crossing the Marne by the weir, they climbed to the road that leads from La Ferté to Montreuil, which was the line of the German retreat, but reached it too late to intercept any German troops. 9 Sept. 1914.

During this movement, shortly before noon, the British infantry was withdrawn from the southern half of La Ferté and the town was heavily bombarded, with the result that the Germans about 2.30 P.M. abandoned the approaches to the bridges, which Royal Engineer officers were then able to reconnoitre. But it was 4 P.M. or later before any effectual repair work could be begun. However, the 1/Rifle Brigade followed the two battalions of the 12th Infantry Brigade across the weir, and the 2/Inniskilling Fusiliers crossed the river higher up by the railway viaduct which was still intact. They were shelled as they did so, but suffered no loss. The 1/East Lancashire and the 1/Hampshire were ferried across in boats below La Ferté, and this tedious operation on a broad and rapid river was not completed until 9 P.M., by which time the Engineers had sufficient barrel piers, etc., ready at site to supplement the pontoons and begin the construction of a floating bridge. When darkness fell on the 9th, ten of the sixteen battalions of the III. Corps were still on the south side of the river: the 10th Infantry Brigade being at Grand Mont Ménard (2 miles east of La Ferté), the King's Own (12th Brigade) at Luzancy, the Somerset Light Infantry (11th Brigade) at Les Abymes (just south of La Ferté) and the 19th Infantry Brigade between Jouarre and Signy Signets.

The positions of the Army at the end of the day were as follows, extending from Chateau Thierry (exclusive) through Bezu and La Ferté sous Jouarre to Jouarre. Sketch 6. Map 26.

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division . . . | Lucy le Bocage, Domptin. |
| 5th Cavalry Brigade . . . | La Baudière (half a mile west of Domptin). |

| | |
|---|---|
| I. Corps . . . . . | Le Thiolet, Mont de Bonneil, Domptin, Coupru. |
| II. Corps . . . . . | Bezu, Crouttes, Caumont. |
| 3rd Cavalry Brigade . | Grand Mont Ménard (south of the Marne). |
| III. Corps . . . . . | Luzancy, Grand Mont Ménard, Jouarre, Chamigny. |

The left of the French Fifth Army had reached the northern edge of Chateau Thierry, in line with the British.

Maps 4 & 26. The 9th September, though we now know that the advance of the B.E.F. was the decisive factor in influencing the Germans to abandon the field of battle,[1] seemed at the time a disappointing day for the British, and the more so since General Maunoury, having been hard pressed on his left and left flank throughout the 8th, had asked for a brisk attack against the left flank and rear of von Kluck. Had the entire British line been able to come up level with the 9th Infantry Brigade when it reached the road from Chateau Thierry through Montreuil to Lizy sur Ourcq at 9 A.M., great results might have followed, for von Kluck's left was well to south of Lizy. But the I. and III. Corps on either flank were checked until late in the day. Not until 5 P.M., after a hard day's fighting, in which he had been reinforced by every man that General Galliéni could spare him from the Paris garrison, was General Maunoury able to report that von Kluck was retiring north-eastward, covering his retreat with his heavy artillery.

Reports from the Flying Corps in the evening confirmed General Maunoury's statement that the road from Lizy sur Ourcq north-eastward to Coulombs was filled with one continuous column of marching Germans.[2] Everywhere else along the great battle line from Verdun to the Ourcq the same retrograde movements of the enemy were reported.

Sketch 5. The gigantic struggle of the 6th to the 9th September, known as the battle of the Marne, in which, so far as can be ascertained, 49 Allied divisions, with eight cavalry divisions, contended against 46 German divisions, with seven cavalry divisions,[3] was over, and with it all the hopes of the rapid knock-out blow with which Germany had counted

[1] See p. 303.

[2] It would seem that this was von Kluck's *5th Division* retiring to Crouy—Coulombs to assist the cavalry and Kraewel's *Composite Brigade* in stopping the British advance (see "Militär Wochenblatt," 12/1920).

[3] Palat, vi. p. 464, says 1,275,000 Germans against 1,125,000 Allies. The Germans lost 38,000 prisoners and 160 guns.

on winning the war against her unprepared opponents. Tactically it was not fought to a finish, but strategically its results were far-reaching, so that it must be regarded as one of the decisive battles of the world.[1] Its general result is well summarized in a proclamation issued by General Franchet d'Esperey on the evening of the 9th September to the Fifth Army: 9 Sept. 1914.

"Held on his flanks, his centre broken, the enemy is "now retreating towards the east and north by forced "marches."

In the area between Verdun and Paris the Armies of Generals Sarrail and de Langle de Cary on the right had held their ground against the German *Fifth*, *Fourth* and part of the *Third Armies*, just as Maunoury had against the *First Army*; in the centre, the right of General Foch's Army had been driven back by the left of the German *Second Army* and the right of the *Third* (he was about to restore the situation by a division transferred from his left to his right, when the German retreat made this unnecessary); but General Franchet d'Esperey, and with him Foch's left, to which he had lent the X. Corps, had been entirely successful, and after severe fighting had hurled back the western wing of von Bülow's Army, which first faced south-west and west instead of south, and then retreated.[2]

On Franchet d'Esperey's left, the B.E.F. had driven back a strong screen under General von der Marwitz, a body of troops little inferior in numbers to itself, composed of four cavalry divisions (including at least eight *Jäger* battalions), the *5th Division*, a composite brigade of the *IX. Corps*, rear guards of the *II.* and *IV. Corps*, and a detachment of the *III. Corps*.[3] In ground eminently advantageous to the defence, it had forced the passage of the Marne and other rivers, and had not only interposed itself between the German *First* and *Second Armies*, but

[1] Falkenhayn (p. 1) tells us that the removal of von Moltke from the post of Chief of the General Staff which followed (see p. 365, below), was concealed so that the change of leadership should not give the enemy propaganda "further ostensible proof of the completeness of the victory obtained on the Marne."

[2] It may be added that the German *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies*, opposed to Generals Dubail and de Castelnau in Lorraine, were also in difficulties. Von Moltke, according to Foerster (p. 34) wrote in a memorandum: "The *Seventh Army*, just as little as the *Sixth*, was unable to advance "to the Moselle in spite of a long and heavy struggle. . . . Both Armies "reported definitely that the enemy opposite them always had superiority "in numbers."

[3] All these formations are definitely mentioned in different German accounts.

whilst the former was fully engaged in front with Maunoury's Army, had turned its left flank. The Germans had no choice, as von Kluck's Chief of Staff admits,[1] except between complete disaster to their right wing and retreat, in order to make good the 25 miles gap in their line of battle. This gap was certainly first created by their own action, but it was widened and exploited by the French Fifth Army and the B.E.F.

The advance of the British has been adversely commented upon as slow and hesitating by several French writers.[2] It has been pointed out [3] that owing to the delay in General Joffre's order reaching Sir John French, the B.E.F. retired on the 5th, instead of advancing, and therefore started two marches behind where the French expected it to be on the morning of the 6th. The average advance on the 6th was eleven miles ; on the 7th nine, and included crossing the Grand Morin ; on the 8th, ten, and included crossing the Petit Morin ; and on the 9th, seven, and included crossing the Marne. In view of the previous labours of the B.E.F., the difficulties of the ground, and the opposition of the enemy, no more could be expected.[4]

As will be seen from the German account of the battle of the Marne, the advance of the British Expeditionary Force was the main factor in determining the German *Second Army* to abandon the struggle.[5]

## The Battle of the Marne (6th to 9th September) from the German Side

Sketch 5. Maps 4, 22, 23, 24, 25 & 26.

Without knowledge of what happened on the German side, the end of the battle of the Marne is something of an enigma. Although the information available is not quite complete, and two of the officers principally concerned in the decision to retreat—Generaloberst von Moltke and Oberst Hentsch—are dead, the three Army commanders of the right wing—von Kluck, von Bülow and von Hausen—and von Kuhl (von Kluck's Chief of the Staff) have written their versions ; and Generalmajor von Baumgarten-

[1] See p. 300.

[2] *E.g.* General Palat. He adds, however, " It seems likely that their " confidence in themselves and particularly in us, had suffered in the " first encounters, which were so little encouraging " (vol. vi. p. 248).

[3] See p. 272.

[4] Cf. von Kluck's ten-mile advance against the British rear guards on the 1st September, when no line of defence interposed, p. 247.

[5] See p. 303.

Crusius has compiled a lengthy account from official sources, containing operation orders and extracts from the war diaries, and more recently has published extracts from a statement written by Hentsch, which practically tell the whole story.[1] The lengthy German *apologia* must necessarily be given here in a very condensed form. 5 Sept. 1914.

On the evening of the 5th September, the German *First Army* had four corps and two cavalry divisions south of the Marne, along the Grand Morin, and a flank guard of one corps and one cavalry division north of the Marne near Meaux, facing west. Part of the latter force, advancing to clear up the situation, had come in contact with General Maunoury's troops during the afternoon. At 10 P.M. von Kluck gave the following orders preparatory to getting into position between the Marne and Oise to face Paris. They were to take effect at 5 A.M. next day. Whilst his left corps, the *IX.*, and the flank guard stood fast, the other three corps were to face about, and begin wheeling to the right on the *IX. Corps*. Very full directions were given as regards transport, which was to be got clear at once; and the withdrawal was to be covered by the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* and weak rear guards of the *II.* and *IV. Corps* on the Grand Morin. In detail, the *III. Corps* was to march to La Ferté Gaucher, the *IV.* to Doue and the *II.* in two columns to Isles les Meldeuses and Germigny, in the loop south of the Marne, north-east of Meaux. Map 22.

On receipt during the night of the information that the *IV. Reserve Corps* had been in action with strong French forces, instructions were sent to General von Linsingen, commanding the *II. Corps*, to start as soon as possible to its assistance, and his two divisions crossed the Marne at Vareddes and the Ourcq at Lizy, respectively, and co-operated with the *IV. Reserve Corps* on the 6th. During the day, the *IV. Corps* also, instead of halting at Doue, was moved back over the Marne north of La Ferté sous Jouarre, and at 10.30 P.M. was ordered to make a night march to the assistance of the right wing. Thus by the morning of the 7th, the *II.*, *IV.* and *IV. Reserve Corps* were engaged against Maunoury, but the *III.* and *IX. Corps* were still south of the Marne. Map 23.

During the 6th September the rear guards of the *II.* and *IV. Corps*, and the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* were

[1] Since the above was written, Hentsch's statement and other documents and evidence in connection with the case have been published in "Die Sendung des Oberstleutnants Hentsch" (Berlin, Mittler).

in action against the British. The *III.* and *IX. Corps* were attacked by the French Fifth Army, and the *IX.* was only extricated from envelopment by the intervention of the *Second Army*, under whose orders von Kluck had temporarily placed these two corps. Meanwhile, the *Second Army*, in accordance with O.H.L. instructions, was wheeling gradually to the right, so as to face Paris on the line Montmirail—Marigny le Grand; its left thus came into collision with General Foch's Ninth Army.

By the morning of the 7th von Kluck seems to have
Map 24. become thoroughly alarmed. According to von Bülow, he sent him the following messages, which von Kluck does not give or allude to in his own book:

10.10 A.M. "*II.*, *IV.* and *IV. Reserve Corps* heavily engaged "west of the Lower Ourcq. Where are the *III.* and *IX.*? What "is the situation there? Reply urgent."

11.15 A.M. "Assistance of *III.* and *IX. Corps* on Ourcq is "very urgent. Enemy considerably reinforced. Send corps "in direction La Ferté Milon and Crouy." [1]

At 1.15 P.M. von Kluck issued orders to these corps also to press forward to the Ourcq battlefield as fast as possible and by the shortest route. He states that, "owing to the "increasing gravity of the situation, divisions had to be "thrown in simply as they became available, and thus "became separated from their corps." He therefore formed four groups under the four corps commanders, Sixt von Armin, von Quast, von Lochow and von Linsingen.

The effect of the change of front of the whole *First Army*, which from facing south beyond the Marne now faced west beyond the Ourcq, and of the simultaneous wheel back of the *Second Army* to the right to face south-west towards Paris, was to create a gap in the German front from west of Montmirail to Lizy on the Ourcq—some twenty miles. To fill the gap there were available only the *Guard* and *5th Cavalry Divisions* of von Richthofen's *Corps* and the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* of von der Marwitz's *Corps*. To support them von Kluck on the 8th September sent the *5th Division*, Kraewel's *Composite Brigade* formed of units of the *IX. Corps*, and part of the *3rd Division*.

As his divisions came up von Kluck endeavoured to outflank Maunoury from the north, and, in view of the British
Maps 25 advance, ordered the destruction of the Marne bridges.
& 26. He was nearly captured, as he himself tells us, on the evening of the 8th near La Ferté Milon by a raid of General Cornulier-

[1] Bülow, p. 56.

Lucinière's Provisional Cavalry Division.[1] Of the *Second Army* von Bülow says: "Although the fight on the 8th "September made further progress in the centre and on "the left wing,[2] no decisive result was achieved. The un- "supported right wing,—*13th Division* and *X. Reserve Corps* "—on the other hand, in order not to be enveloped, had to "be withdrawn in the evening to the line Margny—Le "Thoult."[3] Von Bülow now, on the evening of the 8th, seems to have lost heart. Aeroplanes had reported the advance of the British columns "northwards via Rebais "and Doue (3rd and 5th Divisions); a third column (4th "Division) advancing north-eastwards from La Haute "Maison";[4] and Franchet d'Esperey was continuing the attack on his right, with one column wide on the west moving to outflank him. He says, "in these circumstances "the probability of a break-through of strong enemy forces "between the *First* and *Second Armies* had to be reckoned "with, unless the *First Army* decided to retire in an easterly "direction and regain touch with the *Second Army*." Far from doing so, it was attacking westwards. Von Bülow's map shows the French Fifth Army and the British Expeditionary Force breaking in between him and von Kluck and enveloping his right, and the latter's left wing, on either side of the gap,—a sufficiently alarming situation to face. This situation would become even more critical on the 9th September, if the pressure developed. Von Kluck, however, had a piece of luck, as one of his brigades (Lepel's belonging to the *IV. Reserve Corps*) which had been left behind in Brussels came up and appeared almost behind Maunoury's left flank. He, as reported by General von Kuhl, his Chief of the Staff, took a totally different view of the situation from von Bülow.[5] 7-8 Sept. 1914.

"On the right wing of the *First Army* a successful decision "was certain. The Army had been so disposed that the "enemy's (Maunoury's) northern flank was enveloped and "a brigade was to be sent to interrupt his line of retreat. "On the 9th the fight was making favourable progress "and the enemy had begun to give way. A decision was

[1] See Kluck, p. 119; and Héthay, "Rôle de la Cavalerie Française," p. 148 *et seq.*

[2] Against General Foch, with the assistance of the *XII. Reserve Corps* and *32nd Division* and *23rd Reserve Division* of the German *Third Army*.

[3] See p. 304. Col. Hentsch reported that the right wing of the *Second Army* was "driven back not drawn back."

[4] Bülow, pp. 59, 60.

[5] "Militär Wochenblatt," No. 39/1919.

" certain to be obtained by next morning: we were " convinced of it. . . . Generaloberst von Kluck had not " underestimated the danger of an advance of the British " into the gap between the *First* and *Second Armies*. He " did not, however, consider that much could be expected " from the British troops. After their long retreat and " many defeats, they could, he thought, be effectually " held up on the Marne [which they were not]. Even if " they succeeded in advancing, the victory over Maunoury " on the 10th would compel them to make a hasty retreat. " Further, the British would not dare to make an un- " supported advance whilst the French were being defeated " on their left, and their communications with the sea " threatened. Even if the right wing of the *Second Army* " were forced back, it would not affect the final issue: " rather, if the victory of the *First Army* were decisive, " it would make the enemy's position more precarious."

Von Kuhl himself, writing later, takes a somewhat different view. He says: " After it was established that " the *Second Army* had decided in the morning to retire and " at midday the troops were already in retreat, as there was " no means of reversing this decision, the *First Army* Com- " mand had to conform. Even a victory over Maunoury " could not prevent us from having our left flank enveloped " by superior force, and from being driven away from the " main army. The *First Army* stood isolated." [1]

All this time, from the 5th to the 9th September,[2] no orders came from the Supreme Command, which was established more than 130 miles away at Luxembourg, in no better communication with the Armies than was possible by wireless and by liaison officers in motor cars.[3] Much of its attention seems to have been directed towards the Russian front. Tannenberg had been fought (26th-29th August) and Samsonov's Army annihilated, but the battle of the Masurian Lakes against Rennenkampf was beginning only on the 8th September. On the south-east front, though the Austrians had had some small initial successes on the left at Krasnik (25th August), and Komarow (26th August to 2nd September), the Russians had steadily

[1] Kuhl's " Marne," p. 219.
[2] Kuhl's " Marne," p. 187.
[3] The grave delay in the transmission of wireless messages was due to there being only one receiving station at O.H.L. and to interruptions by weather and the Eiffel Tower. They arrived in such a mutilated state that they had to be repeated three or four times. Kuhl's " Marne," p. 28.

pressed on, and had routed the Austrians at the first battle of Lemberg (31st August to 2nd September), and on the 6th, the very day of the commencement of the battle of the Marne, continuing their offensive, they began the battle of Grodek (6th to 12th September) and drove the Austrians headlong across the San. 4 Sept. 1914.

From the evidence of the German operation orders, it would appear that up to the 4th September the Supreme Command assumed that in France all was going well and according to plan. On the right, the *First* and *Second Armies* were forcing the French away from Paris south-eastwards; on the left the *Sixth* and *Seventh* were pressing on to the Moselle. In the centre the *Third*, *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies* were "heavily engaged against superior forces"; but strategically their slow progress was of advantage, because it gave time for the wing Armies to move forward and envelop the enemy. It looked as if the French would either be surrounded in the open field, or if by withdrawal they evaded the "pincers" preparing for them, would be driven up against the Swiss frontier.

In the orders of the 4th September, 7.45 P.M.,[1] the failure to enclose all the French Armies and the B.E.F. was recognized. "The enemy has evaded the envelopment of "the *First* and *Second Armies*, and part of his force has "joined up with those about Paris." The *First* and *Second Armies* were therefore detailed to face Paris and act against any attack from that direction, whilst the *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies* were to press south-east and the *Sixth* and *Seventh* take the offensive westwards against the Trouée des Charmes between Toul and Epinal, so as to drive together, enclose and capture the French Armies of the right that were opposing them. Thus von Moltke seems to have conceived two separate battles, one near Paris, and the other near Verdun. The *Third Army* was to be prepared to take part in either, as required.

So important did he consider the attack in Lorraine, that when the threat from Paris began to materialize, he still persevered there, instead of sending every man who could be spared from the left to the vital right wing in accordance with the original plan. For this purpose there were trains actually waiting on the sidings. It was not until the 9th September that orders were given for the transfer of the *XV. Corps* from the *Seventh Army* to the west. So confident was Great Headquarters of success, that

[1] See p. 266.

arrangements were actually made on the 7th for the visit of the Kaiser to his victorious Armies, and he was due to be at *Second Army* headquarters on the evening of the 8th,[1] when a meeting of a very different kind took place there, as will be seen.

No orders were sent to the *First* and *Second Armies* from O.H.L. on the 5th, 6th, 7th or 8th—it seems to have still assumed that all was going well near Paris; the critical aspect of the situation there and the imperative necessity of co-ordinating the operations of the Armies forming the German right wing escaped its attention until the 8th September, when after a five days' battle the attempt of the *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies* to break through in Lorraine and cross the Moselle had to be abandoned.

In its dilemma, the Supreme Command on the morning of the 8th September despatched Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch of the Intelligence Section of the General Staff to visit the *Fifth*, *Fourth*, *Third*, *Second* and *First Armies*—a round trip of some 400 miles—to bring back a clear idea of the situation, and with full powers, but without instructions in writing, to order in the name of O.H.L. such movements as he might decide on in order to co-ordinate the retreat, "should rearward movements have already been initiated."[2] Possibly he was told to be guided by the views of Generaloberst von Bülow, the senior of the three Army commanders on the right wing.

Colonel Hentsch went to the *Fifth* and *Fourth Armies*, which were in general holding their own, and then to the headquarters of the *Third Army* in Chalons, where he arrived in the afternoon of the 8th. He reported the situation of that Army to O.H.L. as thoroughly satisfactory. He reached the headquarters of the *Second Army* at Montmort (13 miles E.N.E. of Montmirail) on the evening of the 8th and spent the night there. Judging by von Bülow's version of the situation, which has already been given, he must have found gloomy company. Neither von Bülow nor Hentsch seems to have known that the *First Army* was, as von Kluck now states, hoping for a decisive victory next day; the last news that he had sent on the evening of the 8th was that he was still engaged with strong forces on the line Cuvergnon—Congis.[3]

[1] Baumgarten-Crusius, p. 110. For an account of the operations in Lorraine see the "Army Quarterly," vol. ii. p. 312.

[2] "M.W.B.," 12/1920.

[3] That is, facing west, west of the Ourcq (von Bülow, p. 59). Cuvergnon is near Betz, Congis near Lizy.

Hentsch's report of what occurred at *Second Army* headquarters is as follows : [1] 8-9 Sept. 1914.

" I discussed the situation thoroughly with General-
" oberst v. Bülow, General von Lauenstein (his Chief
" of Staff) and Oberstleutnant Matthes (Operations) on
" the evening of the 8th September in the Chateau of
" Montmort. We weighed every possibility for avoiding
" a retreat ; the tone of the Army Staff was calm and con-
" fident. At 5.30 A.M. on the 9th September I examined
" the situation once again with General von Lauenstein, on
" the basis of the reports that had come in during the night.
" After the *First Army* had withdrawn the *III.* and *IX.*
" *Corps* from the Marne to its right wing, there was no
" other possibility but to go back across the Marne at
" once."

Von Bülow gives more definitely the reasons that forced the retreat upon him. He adds to what he had already said on the evening of the 8th : [2]—" When early on the 9th
" September numerous enemy columns crossed the Marne
" between La Ferté sous Jouarre and Chateau Thierry,
" there remained no doubt that the retreat of the *First*
" *Army* was, for both tactical and strategical reasons,
" unavoidable, and that the *Second Army* must also go
" back, in order not to have its right flank completely
" enveloped."

From this statement of von Bülow, it seems clear that it was the advance of the B.E.F. which had influenced him in making the decision to retreat. This view is confirmed by a statement of an officer of the German Great General Staff,[3] as follows :—

" At *Second Army* headquarters the order for retreat
" was given without consultation with the two neighbour-
" ing Armies, and only after an aeroplane report had come
" in of the advance of five long columns against the Marne
" between La Ferté sous Jouarre and Chateau Thierry.[4]
" Generaloberst von Bülow now sent a wireless message to
" the *First Army* that he was beginning the retreat behind
" the Marne between Damery and Epernay. Lieut.-Colonel
" Hentsch had left before this happened, to order the retire-
" ment of the *First Army* to the north-east."

[1] " M.W.B.," 12/1920.

[2] See p. 299.

[3] Lt.-Col. Müller-Loebnitz, formerly of the Great General Staff, in " Wissen und Wehr," p. 449/1920.

[4] Six British columns and a French cavalry column directed on Azy were moving against this section.

Von Bülow's decision was recorded in a message sent to O.H.L. as follows :—

" Retirement of *First Army* behind the Aisne compelled by " strategic and tactical situation. *Second Army* must support " *First Army* north of the Marne, otherwise the right wing of " the force will be driven in and rolled up."

After a counter-attack, claimed as successful, by the centre and left, the *Second Army* commenced its retirement " about 1 P.M." (German time). In anticipation of this, a wireless message, received at 1.4 P.M. (German time),[1] was sent by von Bülow to the *First Army* as follows :—

" Aviators report advance of four long enemy columns " against the Marne. Heads at 8 A.M. Citry—Pavant— " Nogent l'Artaud. *Second Army* is beginning retirement " right flank Damery." [2]

Meanwhile, Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch had motored to *First Army* Headquarters at Mareuil, which he reached shortly after 12.30 P.M. (German time). " Owing to panics " behind the line," [3] he took seven hours to travel the 60 miles that separated them from those of the *Second Army*. There, as von Kluck bitterly complains, he did not see the Army commander, but had a long conference with General-major von Kuhl, the Chief of the Staff. A full account of the interview is given in the German *First Army* War Diary.[4] According to this, Hentsch stated :

Sketch 5. Map 2. " The position is not favourable. The *Fifth Army* is " firmly held up in front of Verdun, and the *Sixth* and " *Seventh* also, on the line Nancy—Epinal. The *Second* " *Army* is a mere remnant : the decision for its retreat " behind the Marne cannot be altered. Its right wing " was driven back and not withdrawn voluntarily. It is " necessary, therefore, to readjust the whole line to the rear " simultaneously : *Third Army* to north of Chalons, " *Fourth* and *Fifth Armies* in touch with one another " through Clermont en Argonne towards Verdun. The

[1] Kluck, p. 121. This is no doubt the wireless message mentioned just above.

[2] Damery was corrected twenty hours later to Dormans. Citry is opposite Crouttes. Pavant is between Nogent and Crouttes. The four long columns were the British 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Divisions. Baumgarten-Crusius, ii. p. 122, says this message was sent at 11.45 (German time).

[3] " M.W.B.," 12/1920.

[4] Baumgarten-Crusius, p. 134, and Kuhl's " Marne," p. 218. Von Kuhl says that he made his report to von Kluck whilst Lt.-Col. Hentsch waited outside for that commander's decision ; so that apparently von Kluck could have seen Hentsch had he wanted to do so.

"*First Army* must also retire—direction Soissons—Fère en "Tardenois; and if absolutely necessary, still further, even "as far as the line Laon—La Fère. A new Army is being "assembled at St. Quentin, so that fresh operations can "be begun." 9 Sept. 1914.

General von Kuhl urged that the attack of the *First Army* was at that moment in full swing and that retreat would be a difficult matter, as formations were much mixed and the troops very tired. Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch replied that, nevertheless, no other course was open but to retire, at any rate, as far as Soissons, with the left wing behind the Aisne, and emphasized that his instructions were to be operative in spite of any further information which might be received, as he had "full full-powers (*volle Vollmacht*)." Maps 4 & 26.

General von Kuhl states that, "in spite of lively pro- "tests, the headquarters of the *First Army* had to obey "and, with heavy hearts [at 2 P.M. (German time)], issued "orders for the retreat."

Hentsch's account is somewhat different.[1] It is:

"The situation of the *First Army* about midday [when "the conference took place] was such that the left wing "had *already* received the order to go back to the line "Crouy—Coulombs.[2]

"The possibility of the *Second Army* holding the line "of the Marne was therefore out of the question; it must "go further back, if its flank and rear were not to be en- "veloped by the British on the 10th at latest.

[1] "M.W.B.," 12/1920.

[2] That is, across the Ourcq and to face south against the British. Crouy is on the Ourcq about ten miles north of La Ferté sous Jouarre, where the British 4th Division, the left of the B.E.F., crossed the Marne, and Coulombs is 3 miles east of Crouy. Von Kluck's map shows the *5th Division*, *3rd Division* and *IV. Reserve Corps* on this line. Von Kuhl ("Marne," p. 217) admits that this order sent at 10.30 A.M. reached Linsingen's Group, but says it contained a telephone mistake. What was intended was that he should "bend the left flank back over the Ourcq and "send the *5th Division* against the British in the direction Dhuisy (2 miles "south-east of Coulombs)." He says Linsingen withdrew to May en Multien —Coulombs, the same line as Crouy—Coulombs but extended westwards to May. His situation map for 9th September shows von Kluck's right attacking south-west from Betz, and the *First Army* line then curving south-east of May en Multien and then east to Coulombs, with the *5th Division* attacking south-east to support Kraewel's *Composite Brigade*. Hentsch's statement that orders for retirement were issued before he arrived at von Kluck's headquarters is confirmed by two officers of Lepel's brigade (extreme west flank), writing in the M.W.B. of 12th Nov. 1921. It is therein said that the orders for the brigade to retire were sent "in the forenoon of the 9th." The italics of "already" are his. Orders to von Linsingen to swing back his left to face the British went out at 11.30 A.M. (German time).

" My question, whether the *Second Army* could not be " assisted at once, was replied to in the negative, on account " of the situation on the left wing.

" General von Kuhl then said that ' the position of the " ' right wing was favourable : the *IV.* and *IX. Corps* were " ' attacking, and had every prospect of a success. More " ' was not yet known.' "

But Hentsch adds :

" I know, however, for certain that just at this time, " a report from the *IV. Corps* came in that it could not carry " out the attack, as it was itself attacked by strong forces. " I also know for certain that I asked General von Kuhl " if the *First Army* would not be in a position to support " the *Second* with its whole force next day [10th September], " if it succeeded in defeating its own immediate enemy " on the 9th. This was negatived on account of the state " of the Army." [1]

During the evening of the 9th September the *Third Army* received a wireless message from O.H.L. ordering it to remain south of the Marne. At 9.30 P.M. Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch again arrived at *Third Army* headquarters at Chalons on his way back to O.H.L. at Luxembourg. He informed *Third Army* headquarters that the order to remain south of the Marne had been issued by O.H.L. under a misapprehension of the situation on the German right and that, as the *First* and *Second Armies* were, as a matter of fact, retreating next day, the *Third Army* should act on its own responsibility and not read O.H.L. order literally.[2] On this view of the situation the Staff of the *Third Army* had come to a decision to retreat, when at 10.30 P.M. a direct order was received from O.H.L. by wireless, instructing the *Third* and *Fourth Armies* to attack as early as possible on the 10th September. In compliance with this order, the *Third Army* resumed the offensive, which soon became abortive, owing to the withdrawal of the *Second Army* on its right in accordance with the decision made by Generaloberst von Bülow.

It was not until 1.15 P.M. on the 10th September that von Bülow learnt that O.H.L. approved of Hentsch's

[1] Von Kluck, p. 123, says that Hentsch gave the reasons " shaking clear " from Maunoury, reorganization of the corps [divisions and brigades were " mixed up], replacing ammunition and supplies, sending off the Train, " arranging for security of communications, all measures taking up much " time."

[2] Baumgarten-Crusius, p. 139.

action. He then received the following order, which must have been bitter reading for von Kluck : 10 Sept. 1914.

" *First Army* until further orders is placed under com-
" mander of *Second Army*."

At 5.45 P.M. further orders arrived : [1] Maps 2 & 4.

" *Second Army* will go back behind the Vesle, left flank
" Thuizy (10 miles south-east of Rheims). *First Army* will
" receive instructions from *Second Army*. *Third Army*, in
" touch with *Second Army*, will hold the line Mourmelon le
" Petit—Franch. *Fourth Army*, in touch with *Third*, north of
" the Rhine—Marne Canal as far as Revigny area. *Fifth Army*
" will remain where it is. The positions reached by the Armies
" will be entrenched and held."

On this, von Bülow sent the following order to von Kluck : [2]

" The *First Army* on 11th September will retire behind the
" Aisne and, covered by the Aisne valley, will close on the right
" of the *Second Army*. The passages of the Vesle valley at
" Braisne and Fismes are being blocked by the *Second Army*
" with a mixed brigade at each place."

Meantime, on the 9th, von Kluck, acting on Hentsch's instructions, had issued preliminary orders at 2 P.M., followed by others at 8.15 P.M., for a retirement in the general direction of Soissons.

Ludendorff has said, and we may for the moment agree with him :—

" Whether the decision of the *Second Army* head-
" quarters and the order of Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch to the
" *First Army* headquarters to retreat were actually
" necessary from the situation must be decided by historical
" research in later years." [3]

## 10TH SEPTEMBER : THE BEGINNING OF THE PURSUIT

As the line of retreat of the German *First Army* appeared to lie more or less across the British front, there seemed some hope of intercepting it. Acting, therefore, in anti-

[1] Bülow, p. 63. [2] Bülow, p. 63.

[3] Memorandum with reference to Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch's responsibility for the order to retreat from the Marne, circulated down to Divisional Staffs 24th May 1917. In this it was stated that " he acted solely in " accordance with instructions given to him by the then Chief of the General " Staff of the Field Armies " (" M.W.B.," 12/1920).

cipation of General Joffre's written instructions—which arrived next day,—to the effect that, in order to confirm and take advantage of the success already gained, the German forces should be followed with energy so as to allow them no rest — Sir John French at 8.15 P.M. on the 9th September ordered his troops to continue the pursuit northwards at 5 A.M. the next morning.[1]

The instructions issued by G.Q.G. to General Maunoury directed him to continue to gain ground with the Sixth Army to the north, supporting his right on the Ourcq, so as to endeavour to envelop the enemy's right. General Bridoux, who had replaced General Sordet in command of the Cavalry Corps, was to extend this action and reach the flank and rear of the enemy. The 8th Division was to support the left of the British, who, General Joffre hoped, would reach the heights south of the Clignon.

Sketch 6. Maps 4, 26 & 27.

Low clouds and heavy mists made aerial reconnaissance almost impossible until late in the forenoon of the 10th September; the pursuit ordered by Sir John French was begun, but it appeared by 7.15 A.M. that the Germans were clear of the valleys of the Ourcq and Marne; from Ocquerre (2 miles north-east of Lizy) to Changis, nothing was visible from the air, except a small convoy and its escort on an unimportant road 7 miles north-east of Lizy. Meanwhile, the Cavalry Division, under Major-General Allenby, on the extreme right of the B.E.F., had marched at 5 A.M. to the high ground north-west of Bonnes (7 miles north-west of Chateau Thierry), where it came under heavy artillery fire from Latilly, about two miles to the north, and suffered some loss. The 5th Dragoon Guards pushed on to Latilly, but, finding the village strongly occupied by German cyclists and cavalry, awaited the arrival of the 1st Cavalry Brigade and Z Battery R.H.A.;[2] when they came up the Germans decamped.

Proceeding to the summit of a hill a little further north-east, the 1st Cavalry Brigade, between 11 A.M. and noon, caught sight of the main body of a German rear guard—five regiments of cavalry, two batteries, a couple of hundred cyclists, and five hundred wagons, moving from La Croix (2 miles north-east of Latilly) northwards upon Oulchy

[1] Appendix 42.

[2] On 4th Sept. one section each from D and I Batteries were formed temporarily into a four-gun battery and called Z; on 16th Sept. a section from J Battery replaced the section from D. When H Battery joined the 1st Cavalry Division, Z Battery was broken up (28th Sept.).

le Chateau. This party was not more than two miles away, but, as the ground had been soaked by heavy rain, Z Battery could not get into action until all but the wagons of the column had passed out of reach ; and when it did open fire, it was silenced by German guns of greater range. The four batteries of the Cavalry Division therefore advanced north-eastwards through La Croix, and at 1.30 P.M. again opened fire on the convoy. Then a French cavalry division of Conneau's Corps, supported by infantry in motor lorries, came up from Rocourt (3 miles east of Latilly), fell on the flank of the column of wagons, and captured the greater part of it. 10 Sept. 1914.

On the left of General Allenby's cavalry, the 1st Division advanced from Le Thiolet north-north-west upon Courchamps, the 2nd Infantry Brigade leading. Soon after 8 A.M. the Divisional Cavalry brought intelligence that the enemy was in position beyond Priez, a couple of miles to the north of Courchamps on the northern side of the Alland, a small stream in a wide shallow valley. The Sussex and Northamptons were therefore pushed through Priez, where they deployed and began to ascend the hill beyond it. They were met by heavy artillery and rifle fire at a range of less than a thousand yards, but continued to advance slowly until some British battery in rear, mistaking them for Germans, also shelled them severely and they fell back on Priez. Some of the men in retiring passed by the observing station of the 40th Battery and through the intervals between the howitzers, drawing the German fire upon both; Brigadier-General Findlay, who was reconnoitring a position for his guns, was killed by a shell. There then ensued a lull in the fighting during which the 1st (Guards) Brigade, heading for Latilly, came up on the right of the 2nd Infantry Brigade and the 5th Infantry Brigade on its left, making for Monnes against slight opposition. In face of this display of force, between 2 and 3 P.M., the Germans began to fall back slowly. The British batteries followed them up, but did not arrive within effective range until the German columns, after crossing the Ourcq, were filing out of Chouy (5 miles north of Priez), when both field guns and howitzers opened fire on them, apparently with good effect.

Further west, the two cavalry brigades under Brigadier-General Gough, and the 2nd and 3rd Divisions were more successful. The 5th Cavalry Brigade led the way, with the 20th Hussars as advanced guard covering a front of 5 miles from Bussiares (1 mile west of Torcy) to

Germigny. At 6.30 A.M. a hostile column was sighted moving north-eastward from Brumetz (3 miles north of Germigny) upon Chézy, while another, composed chiefly of wagons, was halted on the slopes between those two villages. The brigade therefore moved westwards to Prémont (1 mile north-east of Germigny), whence J Battery opened fire at long range; and, as there was no reply to this fire, Brigadier-General Chetwode at 9 A.M. advanced for about another mile northward to the high ground south of Gandelu, whence he sent two squadrons of the Scots Greys to clear that village, and ordered the 12th Lancers to cross the Clignon a little further to the west at Brumetz, and to cut off the enemy's retreat.

Meanwhile, the 6th Infantry Brigade and the XXXIV. Brigade R.F.A., which formed the advanced guard of the 2nd Division, were crossing the valley of the Clignon at Bussiares (4 miles east of Gandelu) to the right of Gough's cavalry; and, when Hautevesnes, 2 miles further on, was reached soon after 9 A.M., a German convoy could be seen a mile or more to the west toiling up the road from Vinly in the valley of the Clignon north-westwards towards Chézy. Four guns, which formed part of its escort, unlimbered on the heights above Brumetz, while the infantry took up a position in a sunken road, facing eastward, to meet the storm that threatened them from Hautevesnes. The British batteries coming into action soon forced the German guns to retire; and shortly after 10 A.M. the 6th Infantry Brigade was ordered to attack. The 1/King's Royal Rifle Corps deployed and advanced over ground which offered not an atom of cover. Nevertheless, the riflemen closed to within seven hundred yards of the Germans, and at that range pinned them to their cover, whilst the 1/R. Berks. on the right, and the 2/South Staffordshire on the left worked round both of their flanks, when the whole line of Germans surrendered, having lost about one hundred and fifty killed and wounded out of a total of about five hundred present. They were found to be men of the *4th Jäger*, the *2nd Cavalry Division*, the *Guard Cavalry Division*, and the *27th Infantry Regiment* of the *IV. Corps*.

Meanwhile, in Gough's force the 12th Lancers had caught a party of nearly three hundred more, with thirty wagons and four machine guns, who had been driven from Gandelu by the Greys. Moreover, the 9th Infantry Brigade and the 107th Battery, the advanced guard of the 3rd

Division, coming up between the 2nd Division and the cavalry, had struck into the wood from Veuilly (2 miles west of Bussiares) north-westward upon Vinly whilst the 6th Infantry Brigade was attacking from Hautevesnes, and had taken another six hundred prisoners, a most variegated assortment, consisting of men of the *II.*, *III.* and *IV. Corps*, of all three *Jäger* battalions of the *9th Cavalry Division*, and of *Jäger* battalions of the *2nd* and *4th Cavalry Divisions*; all divisions of von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* were thus represented. These, with the exception of a party entrenched to north of Vinly, had offered no very serious resistance. The country was, however, so close that many Germans were left undiscovered in the valley of the Clignon, from which they continued to issue for some days to plunder the neighbouring villages and oppress the villagers, until they were gradually captured. 10 Sept. 1914.

Throughout this little action, General Haig had been chafing to act on a message received about 9 A.M. from General Maud'huy of the French XVIII. Corps on his right, giving him intelligence that fifty-four German heavy guns were moving from Lizy sur Ourcq north-eastward upon Oulchy and offering to co-operate in capturing them. As the heads of both the 1st and 2nd Divisions were sharply engaged at the moment, he could give no immediate orders; and the clouds were so low that later in the forenoon, when he asked for more exact indications from the Flying Corps, such observation as was possible gave no definite result. By 1 P.M. the German column was too far north to be intercepted.

West of the 3rd Division, the 5th Division and the III. Corps met with no opposition. The former advanced to Montreuil early, but Kraewel's *Brigade* had slipped away, and it was too late to cut off any of it except a few wounded. The III. Corps, being occupied for the best part of the day with the passage of the Marne by a pontoon bridge at La Ferté sous Jouarre and the railway bridge at Le Saussoy, was obliged to content itself with occasionally shelling distant targets and with the collection of stragglers. The British casualties on this day did not exceed three hundred and fifty, two-thirds of which were incurred by the 2nd Infantry Brigade in its check near Priez, and the remainder by the 6th Infantry Brigade in its successful action near Hautevesnes. For these the capture of some eighteen hundred Germans, including

wounded,[1] as well as the battery taken by the Lincolnshire, offered some compensation; and the spirits of the troops rose high at the sight of so much abandoned German transport and of so many German stragglers, all pointing to the beginning of some confusion among the enemy. Nevertheless, it was a disappointment that the Germans had not been more severely punished. The general advance during the day was about ten miles. On the evening of the 10th September the four divisions of the I. and II Corps were astride the river Alland, with the cavalry in front astride the upper course of the Ourcq, and the III. Corps behind the left flank. In detail, the positions were :—

Sketch 6. Maps 4 & 27.

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division . . | Breny, Rozet. |
| 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades | Macogny (1½ miles east of Passy), Marizy, Passy, Mosloy (2 miles west of Passy). |
| I. Corps . . . . | Latilly, westward through Rassy to Monnes. |
| II. Corps . . . | Dammard, St. Quentin, Chézy. |
| III. Corps . . . | Vaux sous Coulombs, and southward through Coulombs to Chaton. |

### 11th September : The Incline to the North-East

Sketch 6. Maps 4, 27 & 28.

On the evening of the 10th September Conneau's Cavalry Corps had reached Fère en Tardenois, level with the right of the British Cavalry Division; the French XVIII. Corps was abreast of the British I. Corps, but the remainder of the Fifth Army was still close to the Marne. On the left of the British Army, the French Sixth Army was changing front to the north by wheeling up its right, which was approaching La Ferté Milon—practically level with the British. By General Joffre's Special Instruction No. 21, dated 10th September, the British force had definite boundaries assigned to it between which it was to advance : the road Fère en Tardenois—Bazoches (3 miles west of Fismes) on the right and La Ferté Milon—Longpont—Soissons (but exclusive of this town) on the left; these involved the Army's inclining half right. Accordingly

[1] The I. and II. Corps took 1,000 prisoners, the III. Corps 500 (chiefly wounded and stragglers), and the cavalry 300. The total British casualties from the 6th to 10th Sept. were :—I. Corps, 779; II. Corps, 654; III. Corps (4th Division and 19th Infantry Brigade), 133; Cavalry, 135; total 1,701.

operation orders for the Army on the 11th directed it to continue the pursuit north-eastward at 5 A.M., crossing the Ourcq and making for a line from Bruyères (3 miles west of Fère en Tardenois), north-westward through Cugny to St. Remy and thence 2½ miles westward to La Loge Farm.[1] The march proved a troublesome one, for the front allotted was so narrow that it was impossible to assign a separate road to each division. The advance was covered by the cavalry, General Allenby's division making good the ground from Fère en Tardenois westward to within about a mile of the road from Chateau Thierry to Soissons, and General Gough's two brigades the space from that line for some three miles further west. The advance of the cavalry brought it to a line: Cuiry Housse (6½ miles north of Fère en Tardenois) through Buzancy to Vierzy (9 miles west of Cuiry Housse). No large parties of the enemy were seen except a brigade of cavalry at Braisne on the Vesle (3½ miles north-east of Cuiry Housse) and a party of infantry throwing up entrenchments at Noyant (9 miles west of Braisne). There were clear indications that hostile cavalry had retired in two bodies upon Braisne and Soissons, the former in good order, the latter in some confusion; but although wounded and stragglers were picked up there was no encounter of any kind with the Germans. 11 Sept. 1914.

The march of the infantry, therefore, was wholly undisturbed, except for the congestion of the roads—the III. Corps, in particular, was long delayed by a French column—and by rain which came down heavily in the afternoon and drenched the men to the skin.

The general advance on the 11th was again about ten miles. At nightfall the three centre divisions were across the Ourcq with the cavalry in front 5 miles from the Vesle, and the 1st and 4th Divisions echeloned back on either flank. In detail:— Sketch 6. Map 28.

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division . | Loupeigne (3½ miles N.N.E. of Fère en Tardenois), westward to Arcy Ste. Restitue (4½ miles N.N.W. of Fère). |
| Gough's Cavalry Brigades | Parcy Tigny (6½ miles west of Arcy), north to Villemontoire. |
| I. Corps . . . | Beugneux (3 miles W.S.W. of Arcy), Bruyères, south-west to Rocourt, Oulchy le Chateau. |

[1] Appendix 43.

| | |
|---|---|
| II. Corps . . | Hartennes, south-east to Grand Rozoy (just west of Beugneux), Oulchy la Ville, Billy sur Ourcq, St. Rémy (all just north-west of Oulchy le Chateau). |
| III. Corps . . | La Loge Farm to Chouy. |
| G.H.Q. . . . | Coulommiers. |

The inner flanks of the French Armies on either side of the B.E.F. were abreast of and in touch with it.

### 12th September: The Advance to the Aisne

Sketches 6 & 7. Maps 4, 28 & 29.

Low clouds and rain made aerial reconnaissance so difficult that the Flying Corps could furnish no reports of value on the 12th. News, however, came that Maubeuge had fallen on the 7th, an event which was most opportune for the enemy, since it released the *VII. Reserve Corps* and other German troops for work further south. The German Armies were falling back, mostly in a north-easterly direction, along the whole front as far as the Argonne, with exhausted horses, deficient supplies, and signs of failing ammunition. It remained to be seen how much further the Allies could push their success. There was no sign yet of any movement of enemy reinforcements from the north, but there were some indications that the enemy might hold the line of the Aisne: it was impossible, however, to forecast in what strength, and whether as a mere rear-guard or as a battle position.

The situation with which the Allies were now confronted was by no means clear. If the retreat of the German Armies from the Marne had been followed by disorganization and loss of *moral*, as appeared probable from the numerous stragglers and the mix-up of units evident from the prisoners captured, the operation of converting confusion into disaster must be of the nature of a pursuit. If, on the other hand, their power of resistance, though diminished by heavy loss, was unbroken, as had been the case of the Allies in the retreat to the Seine, the problem of completing their discomfiture would involve bringing them to action again, and winning a fresh battle before pursuit, properly so called, could be resumed. Orders quite appropriate to the pursuit of a broken and disorganized enemy can be wholly unsuited to the very different problem of beating an unbroken foe. They may well lead to the defeat of one's own army, for the

latter situation clearly demands that battle should be delivered with all one's forces united. 12 Sept. 1914.

The enemy certainly appeared to be disorganized, and there were undoubtedly very weak spots in his front. In any case, it was of vital importance that no time should be lost, and no opportunity given to the Germans to reorganize and to reinforce these vulnerable places. Unfortunately for the Allies, there was heavy rain both on the 11th and 12th September, and only two reconnaissance flights were made on the one day and very few on the other.

General Joffre's Special Instruction No. 22, received on the evening of the 11th, directed the Sixth Army (reinforced by the XIII. Corps from the First Army), the British Army, and a portion of the Fifth Army specially detailed to support the British, to deal with the right wing of the German forces, endeavouring always to outflank it by the west. To the B.E.F. the boundaries Bazoches—Craonne on the east, and Soissons—Laon on the west were assigned.

According to a wireless message intercepted on the 11th September, the German *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* were south-west and south-east of Soissons, on the night of the 10th/11th, their horses exhausted and their movement blocked by transport. The French XVIII. Corps reported that the German retreat in front of it was nearly a rout; otherwise there was no definite information.

G.H.Q. orders for the 12th were that the pursuit should be continued, and that the crossing-places of the Aisne should be seized and the high ground on the northern side of the river secured.[1] The day was dark, with torrents of rain which turned the roads into seas of mud, so that observation and movement were both equally difficult. The cavalry was pushed forward early, and at Braisne came to the first obstacle that lay between it and its objective, the river Vesle, running from south-east to north-west down a broad valley to join the Aisne at Condé. On the right of the British, General Conneau's cavalry had already seized the bridge over this stream at Bazoches: and reconnaissance revealed that of the bridges on the British front, that of Courcelles, next below Bazoches, had been destroyed, also one of the two at Braisne and that of La Grange Farm, a mile further down-stream. The second bridge at Braisne was, however, intact and Sketch 7. Map 29.

[1] Appendix 44.

defended by German cavalry and infantry. After clearing away parties of the enemy from La Folie (the ruins of a chateau, 1 mile south-west of Braisne) and Augy (1 mile west of Braisne), the 1st Cavalry Brigade about 11 A.M. attacked Braisne with all three of its regiments dismounted, the battery being unlimbered half a mile north-west of Augy to check the arrival of German reinforcements from the north.

For more than two hours there was sharp fighting, during which, on the right of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, the 1st Division had marched down to the bridge at Bazoches, and the 2nd Division moved down towards that of Courcelles, where the 5th Infantry Brigade, its advanced guard, by various expedients, contrived to effect a crossing. The Worcestershire and some of the Oxfords at once pushed on to the Monthussart Farm (1 mile to the north-east of Braisne), reaching it about 1.30 P.M. Just at that time the 1st Cavalry Brigade succeeded in driving the enemy out of the buildings of Braisne on to the hill beyond it, the 9th Infantry Brigade at the head of the 3rd Division having previously cleared the outskirts of that village, and then advanced on the road to Brenelle. The retreating Germans were thus caught first by the fire of the 5th Dragoon Guards from the west, and then by that of the Oxfords (5th Infantry Brigade) from the east. Such of them as survived, about one hundred and thirty in number, laid down their arms. A few of them were *Guard Uhlans*, but most of them were of the *13th Landwehr Infantry Regiment* of the *25th Landwehr Brigade*, which though Line of Communication troops attached to the *Second Army*,[1] had been hurried to the front.

Meanwhile, further to the left, the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades had proceeded to Serches (4 miles west of Braisne) and pushed out advanced parties northward to Ciry, and thence north-eastward to the bridge over the Vesle leading to the village of Chassemy. The bridge was not destroyed, and so lightly held that the 4th Hussars soon cleared it and pushed on towards Chassemy. Being shelled, however, when in column of route, they sought shelter in the woods to the eastward, and advanced, dismounted, against the chateau on the heights north of the village. The rest of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade then moved to the high ground north-east of Chassemy; and the 4th

[1] This brigade is now known to have been on the extreme right (west) of the German *Second Army*.

Hussars, together with two guns, were sent down to the valley of the Aisne to endeavour to seize the bridge of Vailly. It was now between 3 and 4 P.M. The British horse batteries were just picking up the range of the German guns which had been shelling the 4th Hussars, when two companies of German infantry were reported moving south from Brenelle. The 5th and 16th Lancers at once opened fire on both flanks of this column while the batteries and machine guns engaged it in front. About seventy Germans fell, and at 4.30 P.M. the remainder, about one hundred in all, surrendered. These also belonged to the *13th Landwehr Infantry Regiment*, and apparently had been sent westwards to reinforce Braisne, but were driven by the advance of the 5th Infantry Brigade into the jaws of the British cavalry. Meanwhile, the 4th Hussars sent to surprise the bridge of Vailly reported it destroyed; and the bridge of Condé, a mile and a half below Vailly, though intact, was found to be strongly held. When darkness fell, therefore, not a single bridge over the Aisne was in British hands. 12 Sept. 1914.

The nature of the country—high open ground cut by a succession of streams flowing through deep valleys—was chiefly responsible for this, since it made delaying action by the enemy an easy matter. Heavy rain, with its inevitable result of deep muddy roads, did not help matters for the Allies, and the I. and II. Corps were still 2 miles distant from the river when they halted for the night. On the left the III. Corps had made a great stride forward; hearing that the French 45th Division on its left had become engaged with the enemy holding a position covering Soissons, the corps advanced in a preparatory formation towards the river, but it was 3 P.M. before the leading infantry brigade reached the heights of Septmonts (3 miles south-east of Soissons) overlooking the valley of the Aisne. The news then sent in by the divisional cavalry was interesting: the bridge over the Aisne at Venizel, some three miles north-east of Septmonts, had been damaged, but was still passable both by infantry and cavalry; the ground to the north of it had been entrenched for defence, and a large column of Germans [1] was moving north-east from Soissons over the plateau, on the north side of the river. With great difficulty the 31st Heavy Battery was hauled to the top of the ridge of Septmonts to open fire on this column, and the XXIX. Brigade R.F.A. also unlimbered to support an

[1] *III. Corps* of the *First Army*.

advance of the infantry upon Venizel. But all this took time; the light failed early, shut out by a canopy of rain-clouds, and darkness had come down before these preparations could lead to any result. Major Wilding, commanding the Inniskilling Fusiliers, however, on his own initiative, had sent down two companies to Venizel bridge, and their appearance was the signal for the Germans to attempt its demolition. But of four charges laid only one exploded and the fuzes of the rest were found and removed after dark by Captain Roe by the light of an electric torch, within close range of the Germans entrenched on the northern bank.[1]

Sketch 6. Map 29. The situation at nightfall of the 12th September found the B.E.F. across the Vesle and close up to the Aisne.

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division . . . | Longueval (5 miles east of Braisne), Dhuizel, Courcelles. |
| I. Corps | |
| 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades | Chassemy, Ciry Salsogne. |
| II. Corps | Brenelle, Braisne, Serches, Chacrise (3 miles south-west of Serches). |
| III. Corps . . . . | Septmonts, Buzancy. |

Maps 3 & 4. The British Army was on this day in close touch with the French Armies on either side of it. On its right the French Fifth Army had reached the Vesle along its entire front from Beaumont (10 miles E.S.E. of Rheims) to Fismes, though Fismes itself had been gained only at the cost of heavy losses. On the left, the French Sixth Army had advanced to the Aisne along its whole length from Soissons to Compiègne, and was making ready to cross the river, though every bridge had been broken down. A great effort was being made by Bridoux's Cavalry Corps on its left to get forward to the Oise between Chauny and Noyon to envelop the German right. This operation was the more important since there were many indications that the enemy intended to make some kind of stand on the line of the Aisne, which indeed offered great facilities for defence. The river, winding and sluggish except when in flood, and some two hundred feet wide, is unfordable; it runs through a valley which has steep sides covered with patches of wood, but with a gently sloping or level bottom from a mile to two miles in breadth and over three hundred feet below the level of the plateau through which the course of the stream has been cut. As in the case of many other valleys in the north of France,

[1] Captain S. G. Roe, Inniskilling Fusiliers, was killed in action 20th October 1914.

the sides form a series of spurs and ravines, wooded on the toes of the spurs and sides of the ravines, and the stream passes first close to one side and then to the other in its winding course. There is little cover on the low ground in the valley itself for infantry seeking to force a passage from the south, and no position for artillery to support it, except on the southern heights. The German artillery could harass British troops in the valley at a range of three thousand yards, and yet have no British battery within closer range than five to six thousand yards. 9 Sept. 1914.

In the section opposite the British from Bourg to Venizel (both inclusive) there were seven road bridges, an aqueduct carrying the Oise—Aisne Canal over the river at Bourg, and a railway bridge east of Vailly, where a narrow-gauge railway which runs along the southern bank from the direction of Rheims crosses the river to the northern bank on its way to Soissons. All these bridges, except that at Condé, were eventually found to be more or less unserviceable.

Whether the enemy was in a position to avail himself of the advantages afforded by the line of the Aisne remained to be seen. Though the weather had prevented air reconnaissance, reports from inhabitants and escaped prisoners seemed to show that large bodies of German troops had been moving eastward from Soissons on Neufchatel (15 miles north of Rheims) during the previous three days, which indicated that the enemy feared his centre might be broken and was making efforts to concentrate more troops in front of the French Fifth Army and the British.

## The German Retirement from the Battle of the Marne

The situation in which the German *First Army* stood on the 9th September made its withdrawal northwards a comparatively easy task, for it fitted in with the tactical exigencies of the moment. Part of its right, in its endeavour to envelop the French, was already facing south, and its left (von Linsingen), owing to the British advance, had already been ordered back, part over the Ourcq, to the line May en Multien—Crouy—Coulombs. Consequently all that had to be arranged further was that the centre should conform and then all the divisions of the Army could retire northwards together. The movement Maps 4, 26, 27, 28 & 29.

of von Linsingen's wing was completed early enough for the retirement to be begun before the B.E.F. could come up with him. Von der Marwitz with the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions*, *5th Division* and Kraewel's *Brigade* formed the general rear guard.[1]

Map 27. By the night of the 10th September, the German rear guards were on an east and west line beyond the upper Ourcq, opposite the front of both the B.E.F.—just approaching that river—and the French Sixth Army, from about eight miles east of Fère en Tardenois to Crépy en Valois. Next
Map 28. day von Kluck made a short march to the Aisne; and
Map 29. on the 12th he began sorting out his divisions into their proper corps, and occupied a line on the heights north of the Aisne. This line was in detail: Vailly (von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps*)—Vregny (*III. Corps*)—Vaurezis (*II. Corps*)—Nouvron (*IV. Corps*)—Autreches (*IV. Reserve Corps*)—Tracy le Mont (*IX. Corps*). The German *First Army* had been shaken, but was not beaten.

The German *Second Army* had been severely punished by the French Fifth and Ninth Armies, and its right wing (the *13th Division*) had already been driven back before it began the retreat: it may be considered, therefore, a beaten army, and it withdrew under pressure. By the
Map 27. evening of the 10th September, it was, for the most part, across the Marne, with its rear guards still south of the river from 10 miles west of Chalons to Dormans, its right some nine miles south of the left of von Kluck's Army, and with an actual gap of 16 miles between them.

Map 29. The condition and exposed situation of his right wing were such a source of anxiety to von Bülow on the evening of the 12th September, that he evacuated Rheims and withdrew his right, by a night march, north of the Aisne to the neighbourhood of Berry au Bac. Thus by the 13th he had increased to some eighteen miles the gap between the right of the *Second Army* and the left of the *First Army*, which was at Vailly. In this gap were only three cavalry divisions, the *Guard*, *2nd* and *9th*, under von der Marwitz.[2]

The first and most insistent problem for O.H.L. was how to fill the gap before the Allies could reach it in force and pierce the German line of battle by separating the *First* and *Second Armies*. It is not too much to say that the fate

[1] Baumgarten Crusius, ii. p. 161.

[2] The *4th Cavalry Division* was on the extreme right of the *First Army*, and the *5th* had been sent to the *Third Army*.

of the German Armies on the Western front turned on the solution of this problem. The retreat from the Marne had already begun to have a demoralizing effect on the troops, exhausted as they were by hard and, on the whole, unsuccessful fighting following on the great physical strain of the headlong rush through Belgium to the Marne. If the gap could not be filled, prudence dictated a continuance of the retreat, but that meant a further disintegration of units, and in their present condition was an alternative to be accepted only in the last resort. The Aisne was a good line to stand on, and there if possible a stand must be made. Von Moltke hoped to give his Armies eight days' rest, bring up reinforcements, and replenish supplies and ammunition.[1] No one could forecast what condition the German Army would be in if the retreat was unduly prolonged, although von Bülow was actually prepared to go back to the La Fère line. For to give battle on the Aisne would be fatal if the Allies could penetrate between the *First* and *Second Armies*, and drive the former north-west and the latter north-east. It might well be the beginning of the end. 12 Sept. 1914.

Von Moltke had already placed the *First Army* under von Bülow, and to ensure complete unity of command, gave him also the *Seventh Army*, which was being hurried up to fill the gap between the *First* and *Second*. On the 12th September von Bülow ordered the *First Army* to close on to the right of the *Second*. Von Kluck, as usual, ignored the order, and replied at 8.50 P.M. :

" *First Army* heavily attacked on the front Soissons—
" Attichy, a battle is expected to-morrow. It is holding north
" bank of the Aisne from Attichy to Condé. Left wing can be
" further prolonged,[2] but any advance towards St. Thierry
" (5 miles north-west of Rheims) is out of the question."

According to General von Zwehl, who commanded the *VII. Reserve Corps*, which came up on the 13th on the left of the *III. Corps*, the eastern flank of the *First Army* was then at Ostel, north of Chavonne. The gap between the *First* and *Second Armies* which was covered by the three cavalry divisions was therefore reduced to the 13 miles between Berry au Bac and Ostel. The Germans began entrenching, and von Kluck goes so far as to say that trench

[1] Baumgarten Crusius, ii. p. 176.
[2] He had one division of the *III. Corps* in reserve north of Condé, which he ordered to come up on his left and cover Vailly.

warfare commenced on the 12th September 1914. There is no indication that any entrenchments were prepared in anticipation of a retirement to the Aisne as was rumoured at the time.

## NOTE[1]

### The Second Belgian Sortie from Antwerp, during the Battle of the Marne: 9th-13th September 1914.

Sketch 2. Map 2.

After the first sortie from Antwerp[2] the Belgian Field Army was employed for some days in assisting the fortress troops to improve the defensive works between and in the forts; the Germans also spent the time in consolidating their defences, roughly on an east and west line eight miles north of the centre of Brussels, and therefore some four or five miles from the nearest forts of Antwerp. From the 1st September onwards there were indications of German movements towards the Belgian western flank on the Schelde at Termonde, culminating in an attack on the 4th. It was obvious, however, that this was only a feint to cover the withdrawal southwards of part of the investing force; for the Belgian General Staff had information that the *IX. Reserve Corps* and the *6th Division* of the *III. Reserve Corps* were to be moved to France and their places taken by the *Marine Division* and *Landwehr* formations. On the 5th definite news of the movement came in and it was confirmed on the 6th and 7th. The Belgian Army Command, therefore, considered that a favourable moment for the execution of another sortie had arrived, with the purpose of compelling the enemy to recall forces despatched to take part in the decisive battle in France, or, failing this, to defeat the inferior forces in front of Antwerp and to threaten the German communications.

The operations were planned to begin on the 9th September. In view of the strength of the German entrenchments, a frontal attack was out of the question; two divisions therefore were detailed to cover Antwerp, whilst three divisions and the cavalry turned the enemy's right (eastern) flank towards Aerschot.

The sortie began successfully; the passages of the Demer and Dyle were seized and Aerschot captured; a troop of cavalry even entered Louvain on the 10th. The Germans meanwhile took counter measures; they brought back the *6th Reserve Division* permanently, stopped the march of the *IX. Reserve Corps*, and detrained at Brussels, to assist in repelling the sortie, the leading division (the *30th*) of the *XV. Corps* which was on its way from Alsace to the extreme right flank of the German Armies. This division went into action and remained from the 10th to 13th in the neighbourhood of Brussels.[3] The Belgian advance was brought to a halt, and on the 13th the whole Army retired again to Antwerp. The effect of the delay of the *IX. Reserve*

[1] Mainly from the translated official report, "Military Operations of "Belgium, compiled by the Belgian General Staff for the period 31st July "to 31st December 1914," and anniversary articles contributed to the Press.

[2] See p. 132.

[3] "Schlachten und Gefechte," p. 14.

*Corps* and *30th Division* in reaching the front was not actually felt in the battle of the Marne, as von Kluck and von Bülow retreated on the 9th before these reinforcements could have reached them, even without Belgian interference. The heads of the *XV.* and *IX. Reserve Corps* began to arrive on the Aisne on the 14th and on the Oise on the 16th, respectively, when, as will be seen later, they appeared unfortunately just in time to prevent a decisive success of the Allies. 9-13 Sept. 1914.

# CHAPTER XV

## THE BATTLE OF THE AISNE

### Situation of the German Right Wing on the Night 12th/13th September 1914

(See Sketch 7; Maps 2, 3, 4, 29, 30, 31, 32 & 33)

Sketch 7. Maps 4 & 29.

In order to make the narrative of the battle of the Aisne clear, it seems best, for once, to give the German situation before the British, although of course it was not at the time thus fully known to the Allies. The night of the 12th/13th September marks the end of the retreat so far as the German *First* and *Second Armies* are concerned. During the closing hours of the 12th those of von Kluck's troops (the *5th* and *3rd Divisions*, *IV. Corps* and half of the *IX. Corps*), which were still on the south side of the Aisne, entrenched on the line Billy (south of Venizel)—Cuise Lamotte (south-west of Attichy), covering Soissons, were withdrawn over the river. The re-sorting of his divisions into their original corps from the groups in which they had fought the battle of the Ourcq was meanwhile carried out.

During the same night, von Bülow, alarmed by the forcing of the line of the Vesle by the left of the French and right of the British Armies, drew back his right wing behind the Aisne, as already described, and collected the *VII. Corps*, which had been much dispersed, on his extreme right at Brimont—Berry au Bac. Thus, the front of the German *First* and *Second Armies* now formed a wide re-entrant angle, marked by the lines Prosnes (11 miles south-east of Rheims)—Rheims (exclusive)—Berry au Bac and Ostel (11 miles E.N.E. of Soissons)—Soissons—Compiègne, but with a gap of 13 miles, at least—Berry au Bac to Ostel—between their inner flanks. Actually this gap, which was held by the three cavalry divisions,

The orders allotted the crossings of the Aisne as follows :

Cavalry Division and I. Corps: Bourg, Pont Arcy and Chavonne ;

Gough's cavalry and the II. Corps : Vailly, Condé and Missy.

III. Corps (still without the 6th Division) : Venizel and Soissons. The last place, however, was later handed over to the French.

Maps 29 & 31.

In the III. Corps sector a passage was actually effected on the 12th. Although the girders of the bridge at Venizel had been cut by the explosion of the demolition charges, the reinforced concrete of the roadway was still sound enough to carry light loads. When Brigadier-General Hunter-Weston, commanding the advanced guard of the 4th Division, learnt this, having had orders to cross that night if possible, he marched the 11th Infantry Brigade at 11 P.M. down into the valley and down the wide glacis a mile and a half in length that had to be traversed before the bridge could be reached. He found on approaching it that the German trenches on the bank of the river had been evacuated, and immediately commenced the crossing. Owing to the state of the bridge, the men were sent across in single file, and the ammunition carts were unloaded, and these and their contents passed over by hand.

By 3 A.M. on the 13th the passage was completed, and the brigade was then ordered to secure the heights above by a bayonet charge. This operation was entirely successful, and just as day was dawning the German outposts on the crest, completely surprised by the sudden appearance of the British, incontinently abandoned their trenches and fell back on their main line some hundreds of yards away. Thus, the 11th Infantry Brigade, the first British formation to cross the Aisne, occupied the edge of the plateau from the spur north of Ste. Marguerite westwards through a farm called La Montagne to within a mile of Crouy, 2 miles north-east of Soissons. It was a most satisfactory end to a trying march of some thirty miles through the pouring rain, in a temperature more appropriate to November than early autumn, and with little or no food for more than twenty-four hours.

Sketch 7. Map 31.

The morning was still wet and miserable when, on the extreme right of the British front, the advanced guard of the Cavalry Division rode out from its billets and pushed two reconnoitring patrols forward to the crossings of the Aisne at Villers and Bourg. In every case the road bridges

over the river were found to have been destroyed, but not those over the Aisne Canal, which lies south of it.[1] A sharp fire was opened on the British dragoons by Germans [2] sheltered in houses or entrenched along the bank of the branch canal which, starting close to Bourg, runs north-westwards from the Aisne Canal to the Oise. The aqueduct which carries this branch canal across the river, however, had been only slightly damaged, and J Battery and the XXXII. Brigade R.F.A.[3] came into action to support the attack of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade upon it. But it was not until assistance arrived from the 1st Division that the cavalry was able to effect a crossing. 13 Sept. 1914.

Sir Douglas Haig's orders for the 13th had directed the I. Corps to continue its advance and, in the first instance, to push forward patrols to the river crossings ; the divisions were to close up, well concealed and ready to act on the information obtained by the cavalry. In the event of the enemy seriously disputing the passage of the Aisne, attack orders would be issued ; in the event of his continuing his retirement, the 1st and 2nd Divisions were to occupy ground beyond the river at Bourg, and at Pont Arcy and Chavonne (3 miles below Pont Arcy), respectively, with their advanced guards covering the crossings, and were to push reconnaissances towards the enemy.

The 2nd Infantry Brigade, the leading troops of the 1st Division, therefore, followed the Cavalry Division, after assisting its crossing at Bourg, and took up a covering position on the northern bank. The 1st Cavalry Brigade at once struck eastwards upon Pargnan to gain touch with the French, and General de Lisle took the 2nd Cavalry Brigade northwards along the ridge immediately north of Bourg, from which a German column could be seen moving north from Vendresse. I Battery opened fire upon this with shrapnel, but was answered with such vigour that the 2nd Cavalry Brigade was obliged to fall back to the south side of the ridge.

Further to the left, the divisional cavalry of the 2nd Division reported soon after dawn that the bridge at Chavonne had been destroyed and that the approaches to it were commanded by German snipers. At Pont Arcy itself, however, the demolition of the bridge was only

[1] It finally enters the river lower down, near Vailly.

[2] Apparently the enemy in this area consisted of parts of the *Guard Cavalry Division*, *VII. Corps* and *25th Landwehr Brigade*, all of the *Second Army*.

[3] Temporarily attached to the Cavalry Division.

partial, men on foot could use it, and it was feebly defended; the greater part of the 5th Infantry Brigade was able to cross, practically unopposed, and thus enabled the Engineers to begin the construction of a pontoon bridge further downstream. Meanwhile, at noon the 2/Coldstream were sent to Chavonne to secure, if they could, the passage at that point.

Still further to the left, the II. Corps, in pursuance of G.H.Q. orders, pushed forward the 3rd Division against the bridges at Vailly (where the road passes over both canal and river), and the 5th Division against the bridge of Missy. These two passages are 4 miles apart. The bridge at Condé, midway between them, was intact; it also was allotted to the 5th Division, but the approaches to it could be so easily commanded by machine guns that it had evidently been left open by the enemy as a trap.

The 8th Infantry Brigade, which led the advance of the 3rd Division upon Vailly, was checked when it reached Chassemy, on the edge of the plateau, 1½ miles from the river, by the fire of German howitzers on the promontory of Chivres, a large spur flanking the valley, and it could progress no further. The artillery of the division came into action above Brenelle, to the right rear of Chassemy; but the 49th Battery, unlimbering in the open, was promptly silenced, the detachments being driven from their guns. At 10 A.M. the Royal Scots, working their way down through the woods on the slopes of the valley north of Chassemy, were able to reach the canal not far short of the two bridges; but the outlook was not promising. The light railway bridge a mile above Vailly had been entirely destroyed, and the road bridge over the river was also broken, though the gap was spanned by a single-plank footway which the Germans, in their haste, had left behind them.

Missy bridge, on the other hand, had been seized at 1 A.M. by the 4th Divisional Cyclists, who detached a party to hold it for the II. Corps. But this party had been driven off by superior numbers of Germans at 4 A.M. and the condition of the bridge was now uncertain. An hour or two later two companies of the Royal West Kent, which was the leading battalion of the 13th Infantry Brigade, came down towards this bridge and engaged the hidden machine guns and riflemen on the northern bank and compelled them to retire, though themselves suffering several casualties. It was then possible for a party to

advance and examine the bridge more closely, when it was ascertained that the girders of the most northern of the three spans had been destroyed, leaving a gap of some twenty feet. Heavy fire then compelled the party to withdraw, but the companies entrenched to the east of the bridge. 13 Sept. 1914.

Simultaneously with the movement of the 13th Infantry Brigade upon Missy, the 14th Infantry Brigade, with the 121st Battery, was sent down a side valley to Moulin des Roches, just upstream from Venizel, which had been selected by the engineers as the most suitable place for bridging, and there the brigade remained until past noon whilst the 17th Field Company was constructing a raft.

Still further to the west, in the III. Corps area, the 12th Infantry Brigade, soon after 6 A.M., had begun to defile across the damaged bridge at Venizel, which had by that time been made somewhat safer; and, west of it again, the French Sixth Army was steadily passing the river at Soissons. Both French and British were greeted by fire from German artillery, chiefly 8-inch and 5·9-inch howitzers, in action on the heights to the north. The most troublesome of these, so far as the British were concerned, were three batteries, already mentioned, on the spur of Chivres (just north of Missy), the commanding position in that section of the valley. One of these batteries seemed to be on the eastern branch of the spur, overlooking Condé, and the two others a mile or more further to the north about Les Carrières. The artillery of the 4th and 5th Divisions had by this time taken up position on the plateau, from Le Carrier (1½ miles east of Billy) to Mont de Belleu Farm, on both sides of the valley which cuts into it from Venizel. The 31st and 108th Heavy Batteries succeeded in silencing for a time the German guns which were impeding the advance of the Allies; but they were soon forced by the fire of the German heavy howitzers either to shift position or to withdraw their detachments. These howitzers, in fact, outranged all the British artillery, except the 60-pdr. batteries, and for the time being had complete mastery of the situation.

However, by 11 A.M. all the 12th Infantry Brigade (except the 2/Inniskillings, who had been left behind to bring the guns over the bridge) was across the Aisne at Venizel. In widely extended order, the three battalions made their way across the two miles of water-meadows to Bucy le Long at the foot of the further heights, under

a hail of shrapnel bullets, which did little damage.[1] The 68th Battery followed them, moving by sections, and escaped without casualties. The 10th Infantry Brigade meanwhile took up a position behind the railway embankment westwards from Venizel for 2 miles to Villeneuve St. Germain, to cover a retirement if it should be necessary. The 11th Infantry Brigade, holding the southern edge of the heights above Bucy le Long since early morning, was absolutely unmolested, though German troops were entrenched within eight hundred to fifteen hundred yards north of it, and in the valleys of Chivres and Vregny to its right and front. On the right of this brigade, indeed, the 1/Rifle Brigade had stolen through the woods on the western side of the Chivres valley and was effectively enfilading the German trenches on the eastern side.

Such, then, was the situation about noon. The passage of the Aisne had been forced at both extremities of the British line; and it remained to be seen how far this success would assist the passage of the centre. From all the information furnished to General Haig the gap had not been closed that had existed between the German *First* and *Second Armies* ever since the battle of the Marne, and there was nothing in front of him but a strong force of cavalry—either a weak corps or a division at full strength—and five batteries entrenched on the Chemin des Dames. Against such a force, he naturally hoped to gain ground without making a formal attack.[2] There was news, too,

[1] A translation of what Hauptmann Bloem saw of this attack from Chivres ridge is, apart from its vividness, of interest as showing the superior observation enjoyed by the Germans:

"Across the wide belt of meadow extending between our chain of "heights and the course of the river, stretched what seemed to be a dotted "line formed of longish and widely separated strokes. With field-glasses, "we could see that these strokes were advancing infantry, and unmistakably "English. . . .

"From the bushes bordering the river sprang up and advanced a second "line of skirmishers, with at least ten paces interval from man to man. "Our artillery flashed and hit—naturally, at most, a single man. And "the second line held on and pushed always nearer and nearer. Two "hundred yards behind it came a third wave, a fourth wave. Our artillery "fired like mad: all in vain, a fifth, a sixth line came on, all with good "distance, and with clear intervals between the men. Splendid, we are "all filled with admiration.

"The whole wide plain was now dotted with these funny khaki figures, "always coming nearer. The attack was directed on our neighbour corps "on the right [the *II.*]. And now infantry fire met the attackers, but "wave after wave flooded forward, and disappeared from our view behind "the hanging woods that framed the entrance to the Chivres valley."

[2] This estimate of the German force was correct at the time: the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* had opposed the I. Corps, but reinforcements were approaching them, as will be narrated later in this chapter. See p. 338.

that the 35th Division of the French XVIII. Corps had at 10.30 A.M. crossed the Aisne at Pontavert, 7 miles to his right, with the Germans only one hour ahead of it, and that this division and Conneau's Cavalry Corps were pressing on to the eastern end of the Chemin des Dames ridge and beyond. It may be added here that French infantry of the XVIII. Corps during the day reached Amifontaine, 6 miles north of the Aisne at Berry au Bac, and that some of Conneau's cavalry got as far as Malmaison and Sissonne, 3 and 6 miles further north, respectively, and well behind the German line.[1] The prospects of a break-through were never brighter. 13 Sept. 1914. Map 3.

The ground facing the British I. Corps presented a series of high spurs projecting generally southwards from the Chemin des Dames ridge towards the Aisne. First, commencing from the east, are the Paissy—Pargnan and Bourg spurs, both extending nearly to the river, with the village of Moulins at the top of the valley between them. Next is the short Troyon spur, with Vendresse in the valley east of it, and Beaulne and Chivy west of it. Westwards of these again are the three spurs at the foot of which lie Moussy and Soupir and Chavonne, respectively; only the last of these comes close down to the river. Sketch 7. Maps 30 & 31.

By 1 P.M. the 2nd Infantry Brigade, which, as we saw, was the advanced guard of the 1st Division, had reached the top of the spur north of Bourg, enabling the 2nd Cavalry Brigade to advance again some two miles as far as Moulins, where it was checked by German forces on the ridge north of Troyon. Other German troops were seen moving towards Bourg from Chivy, about a mile west of Troyon, and the Flying Corps reported the concentration of yet more, a mile or two further to the north of Courtecon.[2] The 1st (Guards) and 3rd Infantry Brigades were therefore sent across the river in all haste and by divisional orders were directed north-eastwards towards Paissy to the right of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade. About 4 P.M. the 2nd Infantry Brigade took up a position from Moulins south-west towards Bourg, and released the 2nd Cavalry Brigade to withdraw to its billets east of Bourg. By 6 P.M. the last man of the 1st Infantry Division was on the north bank of the Aisne. The artillery, as it came up to Bourg, was pushed on to the next spur to the east, north of Pargnan, whence, towards evening, the XXV. Brigade R.F.A. and 30th Battery engaged the Germans about Troyon at long range.

[1] See p. 335.] [2] Evidently part of the *VII. Reserve Corps.*

At dusk, the action, in which the artillery of the French Fifth Army had shared, died down; and the 1st Division and 2nd Cavalry Brigade settled down for the night at Paissy, Moulins, Oeuilly and Bourg, the 1st Cavalry Brigade re-crossing to the southern bank of the river at Pont Arcy. The casualties of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade had been slight; fifty German prisoners had been taken and all seemed to be going well. Had the enemy intended to drive the I. Corps back across the Aisne, his chance was gone.

On the left of the 1st Division, the pontoon bridge at Pont Arcy was not completed until 4.30 P.M.; and meanwhile the 2/Coldstream (4th (Guards) Brigade), with the help of artillery, had driven the German sharpshooters from Chavonne, crossed the river there by a temporary trestle bridge and advanced to the top of the ridge beyond it. Here, however, they came under heavy artillery fire, against which their own guns were powerless to help them, for they were out-ranged, and after losing twenty men the Coldstream were withdrawn to the south bank, leaving a company to guard the temporary bridge. It was then so late that the remainder of the 4th (Guards) Brigade and the 6th Infantry Brigade did not attempt to cross the Aisne; and the 5th Infantry Brigade, the only infantry of the 2nd Division on the northern bank,[1] after enduring some hours' bombardment, moved under cover of darkness towards the left of the 1st Division, between Moussy and Verneuil, and took up a line of outposts half a mile further north, astride the Beaulne spur and the two valleys which flank it to the east and west.

Further to the left, in the II. Corps, General Hubert Hamilton, commanding the 3rd Division, after personal inspection of the bridges at Vailly, at 1 P.M. ordered the 8th Infantry Brigade to advance upon them. As already stated, the railway bridge had been completely destroyed, and the road bridge had been broken; but by the single plank spanning the breach in the latter, the Royal Scots and the Royal Irish began at 3 P.M. to cross the Aisne. They were steadily shelled as they did so, and a few men were wounded; but by 4 P.M. the Royal Scots were established in Vauxelles Chateau (1 mile north-west of Vailly) and on the high ground north-west of it; and before nightfall the rest of the 8th Infantry Brigade was in support at St. Pierre (just west of Vailly). The 9th Infantry Brigade followed by the same tedious way during the night;

[1] See p. 328.

while the Engineers, under continued shell fire, began the construction of a pontoon bridge. For the best part of the night, however, the only communication in the 3rd Division between the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades on the north bank of the river and the 7th Infantry Brigade at Braisne, was a single-plank footway. 13 Sept. 1914.

Owing to a misunderstanding a demonstration which was to have been made at Condé bridge by General Gough's cavalry did not take place.

At Missy bridge the West Kents (13th Infantry Brigade) were unable to move from their trenches [1] until nightfall, when under cover of darkness they began to dribble men across the Aisne: first in a boat which had been found under the south bank, then on a small raft of railway sleepers improvised by themselves, and finally on five small rafts constructed by the 59th Field Company R.E. The annihilation of a German patrol, which came down to the bank after about forty men had crossed the river, saved them from interruption by the enemy; and though it was past midnight before the whole battalion had been transferred to the north bank the process was practically unhindered by the Germans. The 2/Scottish Borderers followed and were all across shortly after daylight. The two remaining battalions of the 13th Infantry Brigade were left for the moment at Ciry and Sermoise, a mile or more south of Missy bridge.

Further to the left, at Moulin des Roches, above Venizel, a raft to carry 60 men had been completed by noon on the 13th, and the leading battalion of the 14th Infantry Brigade (the 2/Manchester) began to cross the river, the men concealing themselves as they landed behind a convenient wood on the northern bank. The East Surreys followed them, and by 3 P.M. both battalions, together with their pack animals, were on the German side of the Aisne, and beginning their advance without waiting for the rest of the brigade. As they left the cover of the trees, they came under heavy shrapnel fire from the promontory of Chivres, but pursued their way in extended order towards the eastern end of Ste. Marguerite (half a mile west of Missy) to support the 12th Infantry Brigade, which held the village. As they were approaching, they received a message from Brigadier-General H. F. M. Wilson that his brigade (the 12th) was attacking the Chivres spur from Ste. Marguerite, and begged the 14th Infantry Brigade to help him by striking

[1] See p. 328.

in from the south. It was too late, however, to fall in with this suggestion, but the direction was changed so that the East Surreys should come in on the right of the 12th Infantry Brigade with the Manchesters in echelon to its right rear. The Lancashire Fusiliers and the Essex of the 12th Infantry Brigade were in fact advancing, the former on the right, the latter on the left of the road which leads from Ste. Marguerite to Chivres, against a position of which they knew remarkably little. The ground was swampy and the undergrowth of the woods on the way was very thick, so that progress was slow; but about 5 P.M. the Lancashire Fusiliers came under heavy fire on their front from trenches south of Chivres village, and on their right flank from the western slopes of the Chivres spur. Two companies engaged the enemy in front while a third drove back or silenced the enemy on the flank, the Essex giving such support as they could from the hill above Ste. Marguerite. But the Lancashire Fusiliers could advance no further; and it so happened that just at this moment two guns of the 68th Battery opened fire from an exposed position near the head of the ravine of Le Moncel (half a mile north-west of Ste. Marguerite), drawing heavy retaliation on that area. The guns were compelled to retire, and some advancing parties of the 1/Rifle Brigade (11th Infantry Brigade) were also driven back with considerable loss.

These incidents put a stop to the advance on Chivres. The 14th Infantry Brigade had not been able to assist much, as having to change direction under shrapnel fire it did not come up until the moment for its co-operation had passed. The Lancashire Fusiliers clung to their ground until nightfall, when the Manchesters came forward to relieve them. They had lost 6 officers and over 170 men, and were obliged to leave many of their wounded on the ground, as they were too near the German trenches to permit of their removal. It was long before any troops of the Allies approached nearer than they had to the commanding promontory of Chivres. However, a passage at Moulin des Roches had been effected; and at 9 P.M. the 15th Infantry Brigade marched down to the raft that the 14th had used and began crossing the river, leaving behind their horses and vehicles to follow them at daybreak. Thus before dawn of the 14th September a footing, albeit precarious, had been gained on the north bank of the Aisne at several points; and the situation of the British Army was as follows:—

14 Sept. 1914.

*North Bank of Aisne.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division<br>1st Division<br>5th Infantry Brigade | Between Paissy and Verneuil. |

Gap of 5 miles.

| | |
|---|---|
| 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades | Vauxelles. |

Gap of 3 miles.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1/West Kent and 2/K.O.S.B. of the 13th Infantry Brigade | Missy. |
| 14th and 15th Infantry Brigades<br>4th Division | Ste. Marguerite to Crouy. |

*South Bank of Aisne.*

| | |
|---|---|
| 4th (Guards) and 6th Infantry Brigades | Vieil Arcy, Dhuizel, St. Mard. |
| 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades<br>7th Infantry Brigade | Braisne and vicinity. |
| 13th Infantry Brigade (less two battalions) | South of Missy. |

Both flanks of the British Army were in close touch with the French. On the right the French Fifth Army had met with varying fortune. On its left centre General Conneau's Cavalry Corps had met with unexpected resistance after its first advance, and had fallen back upon Juvincourt (4 miles north of Berry au Bac) to save itself from being cut off. The XVIII. Corps, however, on General Conneau's left and in touch with the British I. Corps was attacking towards Corbeny, Craonne and Craonnelle, so far with encouraging success. Further to the east the French Ninth and Fourth Armies had both made considerable progress and had driven back the enemy. On the left of the British the French Sixth Army had experienced the same difficulties as they had met with. On the extreme right of this Army, that is to say about the point of junction with the British, progress had not been rapid, the troops being delayed at Soissons by want of bridges, and much harassed by the German heavy guns on the heights between Crouy and Vaurezis (3 miles north-west of Soissons). General Maunoury's difficulties in this section of the line were exactly the same as our own. The German guns could shell his troops in the valley at comparatively short range, but could not be reached by the French guns except at long range. On his right, the 45th Division, next to the British, crossed at Soissons, but, though supported

by the 55th Division of Lamaze's Group, had been unable to get beyond Cuffies. The 56th Division failed to secure the passage of the Aisne at Pommiers (2 miles below Soissons). In the centre of the Sixth Army, however, the 14th Division of the VII. Corps got across at Vic; and on the left, part of the IV. French Corps had crossed the Aisne at Berneuil (8½ miles east of Compiègne) and the remainder was clearing the Forest of Compiègne. Maunoury's cavalry was moving north-east, to threaten the German communications.

Map 31. For the better understanding of the situation, it may be recalled here that the Chemin des Dames ridge rises out of the plain of Champagne near Craonne and extends thence, between the valleys of the Aisne and the Ailette, in a continuous unbroken line westward for some five and twenty miles until abreast of Soissons, where it bifurcates near the village of Juvigny, its south-western fork ending a mile or two beyond Nouvron. From the Chemin des Dames countless spurs run down to the valley of the Aisne; and upon some of these spurs, as we have seen, the British had obtained a footing. The XVIII. French Corps seemed to have good prospect of getting on to the eastern edge of the ridge at Craonne; if, in conjunction with the British I. Corps, it could secure the eastern section of the Chemin des Dames from Craonne to Courtecon and then strike westward, it would ease the task of the II. and III. Corps and of General Maunoury's right. If the latter's VII. Corps could simultaneously gain Nouvron and strike thence eastward, it is obvious that there was very good prospect of sweeping the Germans completely from the ridge.

Reviewing the general position, Sir John French decided that he was justified in making a great effort to carry out General Joffre's instructions for an energetic pursuit by attacking along the whole front on the 14th. For all he knew, the Germans might still be in retreat, and there might be nothing before him except obstinate and skilfully posted rear guards. Captured documents proved that the retreat of the enemy was not a mere strategic movement, but had been forced on him as the result of an unsuccessful battle. The weather had been very unsettled on the 13th, though it improved in the afternoon, but aerial reconnaissance had revealed only one German cavalry division and about two infantry divisions between Cerny (8 miles S.S.W. of Laon) and Aizy (2 miles north of Vailly),

and another division near Laon.[1] Appearances seemed to indicate that, except for local counter-attacks, the whole German line was retiring in a north-easterly direction. By dawn on the 14th, the Engineers would have laid a pontoon bridge and a trestle bridge near Vailly. At Missy the bridge had been so much damaged that it could not be repaired in a single night. But even without additional bridges much might be done. 13 Sept. 1914.

General Joffre in his Special Instruction No. 4 of the 13th, also was of opinion that "the enemy was retreating "on the whole front without serious resistance on the Aisne "and the Marne." He ordered that the pursuit should be continued energetically in a general northerly direction, by the British between Athies (just east of Laon) and the Oise, and by the Sixth Army west of the Oise. Map 3.

G.H.Q. operation orders for the 14th,[2] therefore, directed the Army to advance northward to the line Laon—Fresnes (12 miles west of Laon), the Cavalry Division covering the right and the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades the left of the force.

Sir Douglas Haig decided to make the Chemin des Dames ridge the first objective of the I. Corps and ordered the 1st Division to advance to the section from Cerny westward to Courtecon, and the 2nd Division from Courtecon, exclusive, westward to the tunnel through which the Oise canal pierces the hill from Pargny to Braye. Whether further progress could be made would depend on the movements of the II. Corps. The Cavalry Division was directed to be prepared to push on to Laon. The orders entailed the 4th and 6th Infantry Brigades of the 2nd Division crossing the Aisne at daybreak. Map 31.

In the II. Corps, both divisions were ordered to continue the pursuit northwards, Gough's cavalry following as soon as the bridges were clear.

In the III. Corps, similarly, the 4th Division was ordered to resume the offensive and gain first the northern

[1] This report, as is now known, was correct. The two infantry divisions in the line were the *13th Reserve Division* (just arrived) and one of the *III. Corps*. But on the east of the space reported on, Cerny—Aizy, the *14th Reserve Division* was coming up, and on the west, opposite the British, were the other division of the *III. Corps* and the whole of the *II. Corps*. The *Guard Cavalry Division* was still in line, but the *2nd* and *9th* were pulled out as the infantry came up.

Thus, there were six infantry divisions and a cavalry division in front of the British, with a corps, the *XV.*, behind. This corps went in next day against the French on the east of the *VII. Reserve Corps*.

[2] Appendix 47.

edge of the high ground between Vregny—Braye, some two and a half miles from the southern edge of the plateau where the division was established. The divisional artillery and the 19th Infantry Brigade were still to remain on the south bank of the Aisne.

### The 13th September on the German Side

Map 2. With better management than at the Marne, the German Supreme Command at the Aisne had divisions available to fill the gap between the *First* and *Second Armies*. On the 7th September, the *XV. Corps* (*Seventh Army*) and the *7th Cavalry Division* (*Sixth Army*) had been ordered westward[1] from the left in Alsace, with the intention of placing them, with the *IX. Reserve Corps* from Antwerp, as a new *Seventh Army*, on the extreme right of the German Force, so as to outflank Maunoury's Army, just as that Army had outflanked von Kluck.

These troops became available too late to fulfil that purpose during the battle of the Marne, but, diverted from its original destination, the *VII. Reserve Corps*, released by the fall of Maubeuge, arrived in the nick of time on the 13th to stop the gap north of the Aisne. It anticipated the British I. Corps by a couple of hours only ; on this small margin of time did the stand of the Germans on the Aisne depend. Next day the *XV. Corps* in a similar way stopped the French advance on the British right.

It is therefore of some interest to examine the movements of the German troops concerned. Maubeuge had surrendered on the evening of the 7th September, with effect from noon on the 8th,[2] and the *VII. Reserve Corps*, leaving two battalions as garrison and three as escort to prisoners, was at first under orders to proceed northwards against the British who had landed on the Flanders coast.[3] The orders were subsequently cancelled and the corps left Maubeuge on the 10th September to march to La Fère, where it was to form the nucleus of the *Seventh Army*, whose commander, Generaloberst von Heeringen, had arrived in Brussels. The necessity of filling the gap between von Bülow and von Kluck and preventing a

[1] Stegemann, ii. p. 26.

[2] A full account of the siege of Maubeuge will be found in Zwehl and in Commandant P. Cassou's "La vérité sur le siège de Maubeuge." (Paris, Berger-Levrault, 3 francs.)

[3] Zwehl, p. 54. Three battalions of Royal Marines had landed, see p. 219.

break-through was deemed to be so urgent that for the moment all thought of outflanking movements was abandoned, and at 9.40 A.M. on the 12th the orders of the *VII. Reserve Corps* were again changed, and General von Zwehl, its commander, was directed to march it with all speed to Laon, where he was to receive further instructions. After a two-hours' halt in the evening, it pressed on all through the night in two columns. About 6 A.M. on the 13th the corps bivouacked in two groups 5 miles south and south-east of Laon, after a march of 40 miles in twenty-four hours: from a fifth to a fourth of its infantry had fallen out.[1] 13 Sept. 1914.

At 8 A.M. the *VII. Reserve Corps* was instructed by von Bülow—under whose orders the *Seventh Army* and also the *First Army* had been placed—to move up on the left (east) of the *First Army*, which " was awaiting battle on the " general line Vailly—Soissons—Attichy." General von Zwehl ordered the march to be resumed at 9.30 A.M. in a south-west direction towards Chavonne, so as to reach the Chemin des Dames as soon as possible. He directed his *13th Reserve Division* on Braye en Laonnais and the *14th Reserve Division* on Cerny. He hoped thus, by being in a position to move either south-east or south-west, to be able to hold the gap. Shortly before 11 A.M. a further order was received from von Bülow, ordering the *VII. Reserve Corps* to Berry au Bac, 15 miles east of Chavonne, where his right was threatened. Unfortunately for the British Expeditionary Force, von Zwehl considered his troops too far committed to the direction that he had given them, and ignored von Bülow's cry for help. Had he moved his corps to the south-east, he would have left the way clear for the British I. Corps to establish itself on the Chemin des Dames ridge, and the flank of all the German forces west of it might have been turned. As it was, by 2 P.M. on the 13th September the entire *13th Reserve Division* was in position along the Chemin des Dames, north of Braye, its foremost troops having reached it and relieved the cavalry considerably earlier. It was thus ready when the leading troops of the I. Corps approached. The *14th Reserve Division*, the other division of the corps, was divided into two portions :—one brigade, the *27th Reserve*, with three batteries, came up on the east of the *13th Reserve Division* at Cerny (north of Troyon) about 2 P.M.; the *28th Brigade* marched further Maps 30 & 31.

[1] Zwehl, p. 59 *et seq.*, from which the details of the operations of the *VII. Reserve Corps* are taken.

eastward against the French. Between these two brigades von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* assembled.[1]

Thus, even by the afternoon of the 13th, the crisis of the battle of the Aisne was, for the Germans, practically over; the screen in the gap had been sufficiently strengthened to stop the British advanced guards, and by troops who had not borne the burden of the rapid advance to the Marne and the disheartening retreat to the Aisne. In front of the British there was a continuous line from east to west :—part of the *II. Cavalry Corps*, *VII. Reserve Corps*, the *III. Corps* with the *34th Infantry Brigade* of the *IX. Corps* interpolated in its centre opposite Vailly, the *II. Corps*, and part of the *IV. Corps*.[2] Moreover, the German *First* and *Second Armies* had held their ground and time had been gained to improve their defences. Von Bülow hoped "by an offensive advance on the 14th September "completely to consolidate" the line of his three Armies. In the *Seventh Army*, the *XV. Corps*, then on the point of arriving, was to attack south-eastwards with the object of cutting off the French who had penetrated into the re-entrant between the German Armies, drive them back over the Aisne and occupy the high ground on the southern bank. The *VII. Reserve Corps* was to co-operate in this movement: and von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* was first to cover the arrival of the *XV. Corps* and then secure its eastern flank. The *6th Division* of the *First Army* was also to participate in the attack.[3]

## 14th September: The Day of Battle

Sketch 7. Maps 31 & 32.

In the description of the actions of the 14th September, although some sort of order may appear in the narrative, it must be borne in mind that in consequence of thick weather, of the fighting being at close quarters, sometimes even hand-to-hand, and of the heavy casualties, there actually was very great confusion. It was most difficult for divisional and brigade staffs, even for battalion commanders, to follow all the vicissitudes of the combat, and

[1] It may be added that on the afternoon of the 13th, the *25th Landwehr Brigade* joined the *VII. Reserve Corps*; on the 13th also, 1,200 reinforcements, intended for the *X. Corps*, were assigned to the *27th Reserve Brigade*, as also a Horse Artillery *Abteilung* of the *9th Cavalry Division*; and two 8-inch howitzer batteries were allotted to the corps; on the 14th two battalions arrived from Maubeuge; and on the 17th a complete brigade of the *XII. Corps* reinforced it.

[2] See Zwehl, Maps 3 and 4.

[3] The operation order is in Zwehl, p. 68.

almost impossible to record them in detail. Even could they have done so, their accounts could scarcely have done justice to the desperate character of the encounter on the Chemin des Dames ridge and near the Chivres spur. The fighting resembled that of Waterloo or Inkerman, except that the combatants, instead of being shoulder to shoulder, controlled by their officers, advanced in open order and in small parties, and fought usually behind cover or lying down; there was little of a spectacular nature, except when the enemy tried to bear down all opposition by weight of numbers. 14 Sept. 1914.

To epitomize the day's work — the British divisions came piecemeal on to the battlefield to the support of the advanced guards already across the Aisne. They found the enemy not only in position, entrenched and supported by 8-inch howitzers, but in such force that so far from manifesting any intention of continuing his retreat, he made every effort to drive the British back over the river. Thus the 14th September passed in alternate attack and counter-attack, and ended in no decisive result. It was the first day of that "stabilization" of the battle line that was to last so many weary months—the beginning, as it turned out, of trench warfare.

## I. Corps

### *Advance of the 1st Division.*

Reconnaissances during the night had established the fact that parties of the enemy were established in a sugar factory a little north-west of Troyon and at some cross-roads just beyond. To protect the march of the 1st Division, therefore, the 2nd Infantry Brigade, with two batteries of the XXV. Brigade R.F.A., all under Brigadier-General Bulfin, was ordered to seize before daybreak the top of the Chemin des Dames ridge from Cerny to a road junction a mile westward. Under cover of this force, the advanced guard of the division—the 1st (Guards) Brigade, a battery, and a field company, under Brigadier-General Maxse — clearing Moulin by 7.30 A.M. was to march northward on Chamouille via Cerny. The main body of the division was then to follow, except two brigades of artillery and the heavy battery, which were to cover the advance from Paissy spur. Maps 31 & 32.

At 3 A.M., amid heavy rain and dense mist, General Bulfin's force moved by Vendresse upon Troyon, the

2/King's Royal Rifle Corps and 2/Sussex leading. The village which lies close below the crest of the ridge was occupied by 4 A.M. Before advancing further, General Bulfin threw out the Northamptons to the spur next to the eastward, in order to protect his right flank, and then sent the K.R.R.C. on the right and the Sussex on the left forward to the crest of the ridge where they immediately came under fire. The two leading companies of the Sussex, finding that the fire came from trenches some three hundred yards to the north of them, moved westward so as to take the defenders in flank. For a brief space there was a sharp interchange of rifle fire ; and then large numbers of Germans threw up their hands in token of surrender. Some of the Sussex rose to their feet to bring their prisoners in, upon which other Germans in rear opened fire indiscriminately upon friend and foe ; but, none the less, some three hundred of the enemy were captured and sent to the rear.[1] Continuing the fight, the left half-company of the Sussex succeeded in overlapping the western flank of the Germans, who, astride the road from Troyon north-west to the sugar factory, were opposing the progress of the K.R.R.C. ; and the British marksmanship was so accurate that here also numbers of Germans threw up their hands. Thereupon, two German batteries, entrenched east of the factory, opened fire upon their unhappy comrades, who, between German shells from the east and British bullets from the south and west, were quickly exterminated. Teams then appeared near the two batteries, but in a very short time every driver, horse and gunner was shot down by the British rifles ; and twelve guns remained silent and derelict upon the plateau.[2]

It was now nearly 7 A.M. The head of the 1st (Guards) Brigade had reached Vendresse, where General Maxse decided to advance and prolong the line of the 2nd to the left. The 3rd Infantry Brigade was in reserve on the right rear of the 2nd at Moulins, less the Queen's, which was on its way further east to the plateau of Paissy (2 miles east of Vendresse) to act as right flank guard and escort to the portion of the divisional artillery in readiness there. The 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades were in observation near Paissy itself, and the 2nd Cavalry Brigade in the neighbourhood of Vendresse,

[1] Principally men of the *16th Reserve Infantry Regiment* (*VII. Reserve Corps*) and *78th Infantry Regiment* (*X. Corps*).

[2] Zwehl, p. 73, says only one battery (*1st* of the *Reserve F.A. Regiment No. 14* on the left of the *Abteilung*).

to which position it had fallen back after General Bulfin's force had passed through it. The 2nd Division was not ready to move, the 6th Infantry Brigade having not yet finished the passage of the Aisne. The two batteries also assigned to General Bulfin's force had not yet joined him, nor was there the slightest prospect in the fog that prevailed that they could find a target when they did arrive. 14 Sept. 1914.

After 7 A.M. the fusilade upon the ridge of the Chemin des Dames increased, and by 8 A.M. Major-General Lomax (1st Division) was satisfied that a strong German attack was developing upon the front of his 2nd Brigade, and despatched a message to the Cavalry Division at Paissy asking that his right flank should be protected. Between 8 and 9 A.M. the combat rapidly became more intense. The 1st (Guards) Brigade, led by the 1/Coldstream, was approaching the left of the 2nd Infantry Brigade, but General Lomax sent orders to Brigadier-General Bulfin not to push on after he had secured the high ground. Meanwhile the Loyal North Lancashire were sent up by General Bulfin from brigade reserve to support the K.R.R.C. and the Sussex in the attack upon the factory; and all three battalions advanced, and succeeded in occupying the buildings and entrenching on the flat top of the ridge beyond. They actually passed through the two abandoned German batteries; but, though they clung to the position which they had taken up, they were unable to make further headway against the enemy, entrenched with field guns and machine guns to the north and east of the factory. He, on his side, made repeated counter-attacks, which were steadily repulsed.

Meanwhile the 1/Coldstream were struggling through a large and thick patch of wood in the Vendresse valley and up the very steep hillside which led to the top of the ridge. On reaching it, their commanding officer, Colonel Ponsonby, learnt that the Cameron Highlanders [1] and the Black Watch had discovered an easier road and were already in position. There was, however, still a space left for his battalion between them and the left of the 2nd Infantry Brigade. He accordingly deployed it and led it forward as far as the actual roadway of the Chemin des Dames, along which he aligned his men. The road has steep banks; but the German artillery fire was very heavy and the Coldstream suffered severely. Finally, Colonel Ponsonby collected the equivalent of about a company and led them forward to

[1] The 1/Cameron Highlanders had taken the place of the 2/Royal Munster Fusiliers in the 1st (Guards) Brigade.

the village of Cerny (¾ mile north of Troyon) and on the far side of the ridge and beyond it, penetrating far into the German position. So obscure was the whole situation, owing to the fog, that he at first mistook the Germans all round him for British, while they on their part mistook the Coldstream for their own men. The Coldstream, however, were the first to realize the truth, and under their fire the enemy near them speedily disappeared. The rest of the battalion worked its way further to the east and formed on the right of the K.R.R.C., prolonging its line to the east. Still further to the east, the Queen's, nominally a right flank guard, also crossed the Chemin des Dames, but met with no serious resistance till it reached the northern slope by La Bovelle Farm (½ mile north-east of Cerny). Here the battalion took up a position and engaged the German reserves in the valley of the Ailette north of it, turning its machine gun upon the flank of any German troops that chanced to pass across its front, and inflicting considerable damage. Actually, therefore, there were two separate points, a mile apart, at which the German line had been pierced with no great trouble or loss; and five companies in all of British infantry were looking down into the valley of the Ailette.

The confusion on the ridge owing to the fog, however, was remarkable even for a modern battlefield. The Germans unfortunately enjoyed the advantage of having their guns in position and, indifferent whether they hit friend or foe, maintained a heavy fire, which caused the British considerable loss. The British batteries, on the other hand, took some time to reach their position on the plateau of Paissy, and when they arrived there did not immediately open fire, fearing to do more harm than good. Before 11 A.M., however, the 54th and 114th Batteries did signal service to the 2nd Infantry Brigade; and the 116th, coming boldly into the firing line east of Troyon, fought alongside the infantry. Nevertheless, the general situation was unpleasant, and, for reasons that will be given later, there was no sign of the 2nd Division coming up on the left of the 1st.

Meantime the 3rd Infantry Brigade, which had been despatched by the divisional commander to reinforce the left of the 1st (Guards) Brigade, found itself about 10.30 A.M. upon the eastern flank of the *25th Reserve Infantry Brigade* which was pressing south-westward towards Vendresse, between Chivy and Troyon. Soon afterwards the fog

lifted, and the 46th and 113th Batteries, unlimbering near Moussy, south-west of Vendresse, opened fire on this force with deadly effect. The advance of the Germans was checked, and the 2/Welch Regiment and 1/South Wales Borderers delivered an attack upon them towards the north-west. The progress of the Borderers was much impeded by dense woods, but the Welch, having clear ground before them, pressed their assault with great determination and, carrying all before them, established themselves firmly on the south-eastern slopes of the Beaulne spur. 14 Sept. 1914.

It was now about 1 P.M. The Welch were in the position above described, and the South Wales Borderers in rear of them, between Chivy and Beaulne. They had done their work well; but they had hardly completed it before the Germans launched a counter-attack [1] against the entire front of the 2nd Infantry and 1st (Guards) Brigades. The first onslaught fell on the British right, and it drove the 2nd Infantry Brigade from the sugar factory and back through the two derelict German batteries to the position which it had held earlier in the day. The ground thus regained by the enemy was of no great depth, but it was sufficient to expose the right flank of the Cameron Highlanders (1st Brigade), upon whom the Germans turned a devastating machine-gun fire.

This battalion had in the morning formed for attack under cover of the wood by the head of the Chivy valley, which runs down from the Chemin des Dames to Chivy, a little to the west of Troyon. It came under rifle fire before it was clear of the trees, and on emerging into the open was immediately checked by a storm of shells from its front and left, and by enfilade fire of machine guns from the right. The right company, which came up first, was shattered almost immediately, but the remaining companies came on in succession and maintained the attack. A company of the 1/Black Watch was pushed up on the right of the Camerons and part of the 1/Scots Guards [2] on their left; and the whole, pressing steadily on, charged the German trenches on the plateau above them, and carried them with an irresistible rush. Then, attacked in flank and riddled through and through, with more than half of the men down and with ammunition failing, the Highlanders gradually dribbled back into the Chivy valley,

[1] For the German forces engaged against the 1st Division see pp. 361 and 409. In infantry they amounted to over eighteen battalions.

[2] Two companies were absent as escort to artillery.

whence they had started. A last party of fifty Camerons, under Major Hon. A. H. Maitland, clung to the ground that they had won, until their ammunition was almost exhausted; then they fell back fifty yards behind the crest of the ridge. There they were attacked by masses of the enemy, five and six deep and, after beating back the first onset in which their commander was killed, were finally overwhelmed by sheer numbers.

Two companies of the 1/Gloucestershire, the reserve of the 3rd Infantry Brigade (the rest of the battalion being divisional reserve), were sent forward to cover the retirement of the Camerons, and of such of the Black Watch as were with them; and the Highlanders were delivered from their pursuers. The troops between them and Troyon gradually conformed to the new front, facing north-west. The Queen's were still at La Bovelle, and Colonel Ponsonby's party of the 1/Coldstream was still north of Cerny, these forming, as it were, advanced posts in front of the right and right centre of the British line. The whole of the infantry of the 1st Division except the two companies in divisional reserve had been put into the fight. The situation remained practically unchanged for the next two hours, during which the Germans continued to make counter-attacks at various points along the whole length of the line —attacks which grew weaker and weaker after each repulse, until by 3 P.M. they had practically died away.

### *The Advance of the 2nd Division.*

Maps 31 & 32. Leaving the 1st Division, we will now turn to the 2nd Division on its immediate left.

The orders issued by Major-General Monro to the 2nd Division were that the 6th Infantry Brigade with the XXXIV. Brigade R.F.A. should form the new advanced guard under Brigadier-General Davies, and begin the passage of the Aisne by the pontoon bridge at Pont Arcy at 5 A.M. Having crossed the river, under protection of the 5th Infantry Brigade in its position between Verneuil and Moussy, the 6th was to advance northwards through the 5th, as soon as it was clear. The latter was then to follow. The 4th (Guards) Brigade with the XXXVI. Brigade R.F.A., crossing by the same bridge at 7 A.M. (actually, the bridge was not clear for them until 8.30 A.M.), was to turn north-westward, through Soupir (about two miles W.N.W. of Pont Arcy) and La Cour de Soupir (about one

mile north-west of Soupir), to the summit of the Soupir spur, which juts out to the Aisne between Soupir and Chavonne. The rest of the division, including two brigades of artillery, was to follow the Guards, except the heavy battery, which was to cross the river at Bourg and join the column north of the river; actually one of these brigades, the XLIV. (Howitzer), also crossed at Bourg. 14 Sept. 1914.

The leading battalion of the 6th Infantry Brigade began its crossing punctually at the named hour; but though not interfered with by the enemy, the march of the troops over the narrow floating bridge was slow; and it was 8 A.M. before the entire brigade, with its attached guns, was assembled on the north bank. The 1/Royal Berkshire, preceded by two troops of the 15th Hussars, were then pushed north-north-west towards Braye, up the long valley in which lies the Oise and Aisne Canal, with two companies of the 1/K.R.R.C. thrown out upon the hills on either hand as flank guards. This canal valley breaks into the main ridge so deeply that Braye, which stands at the head of its western fork, is hardly half a mile from the Chemin des Dames. On the sides of spurs which jut out on the eastern side of this valley are the villages of Verneuil and Moussy.

Shortly after 9 A.M., on reaching a line east and west of La Maison Brulée (about half-way between Moussy and Braye), the Royal Berkshire were checked by heavy shell and rifle fire, from the high ground north of the latter village; and there was some delay whilst the King's were brought forward and extended to the right of the Royal Berkshire, between them and their right flank guard. The batteries which had crossed the Aisne at Bourg were also retarded by a steady rain of German shells upon the road leading northward from Bourg to Courtonne. However, at 10 A.M. the 50th and 70th Batteries of the XXXIV. Brigade R.F.A. came into action on the southern slopes of the Moussy spur; and at 10.30 A.M. the 6th Infantry Brigade opened its attack. Two companies of the 1/K.R.R.C., moving along the summit of this same spur (Point 158), formed the right. On their left, the King's entered the woods that clothe the western slope of the spur on the eastern side of the Oise Canal; and the Royal Berkshire advanced on the lower ground west of the King's, their left flank being guarded by the two remaining companies of the K.R.R.C. on the subsidiary spur of La Bovette, immediately to the north of Soupir village.

The attack appears to have been launched prematurely, before the troops on Moussy spur had had time to reach their places in the line. In any case, it is certain that, whether from accident or design, the Royal Berkshire outstripped the King's, and that the King's outstripped the two companies of the K.R.R.C. on their right. The Berkshire made their way successfully to the foot of the spur which juts southward from the Chemin des Dames just to north-east of Braye village, and by noon had two companies in action on its lower slopes. But they could advance no further, finding their progress barred by fire from tiers of trenches in their front and from both flanks. The King's, though under heavy fire from howitzers, field guns and rifles, likewise advanced nearly to the foot of the main ridge of the Chemin des Dames, where they, too, were brought to a stand by fire from tiers of German trenches on the steep slope before them, from their right flank and from their rear. An effort was made, with the help of the 2/Worcestershire (the head of the 5th Infantry Brigade), to clear the trenches on the right from which the enfilade fire proceeded, but without success. Still further to the east, the two companies of the 1/K.R.R.C. pushed on to a wood, where they were counter-attacked by infantry in front, and enfiladed by machine guns from a flank. They fought vigorously and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, but were finally forced back to the top of the spur above Moussy ; and the German counter-attack spread further to the west. The Royal Berkshire and King's were pushed back abreast of Beaulne village only half a mile from Moussy ; but the K.R.R.C., having been reinforced by the 2/Worcestershire and the Highland Light Infantry, were able to stem the German onslaught until, by the aid of the 46th and 113th Batteries and of the 3rd Infantry Brigade which had advanced on their right, as already described, they finally repulsed the enemy with very heavy loss.

Although the 2/Grenadiers, the leading battalion of the 4th (Guards) Brigade, which was to prolong the left of the 6th Infantry Brigade, commenced to cross the pontoon bridge at 8.30 A.M., the Irish Guards, who were the last battalion, were not all across, according to their diary, until 10 A.M. The Connaught Rangers had been detached from the 5th Infantry Brigade, the covering force, to hold Soupir spur until the Guards should arrive ; and their commanding officer decided to move to La Cour

de Soupir Farm, where there was a good defensive position. Reaching this spot at 5.30 A.M., he pushed out patrols, and ascertained that the spur was clear of the enemy as far as its highest point, 197—La Croix sans Tête—half a mile further north. At 9.30 A.M. the first parties of the Guards came up, having been heavily shelled on the way; but no more arrived until two hours later; and meanwhile, at 10.30 A.M., the outposts reported the advance of German infantry in force. The Connaught Rangers were at once deployed east and west of La Cour de Soupir. The detachment of the 1/K.R.R.C. was not yet in position on the crest of La Bovette, to their right; and the enemy, covered by the fire of his artillery, attacked in large masses over the open, at the same time sending troops into the wood about La Bovette, to turn the flank of the Connaught Rangers. On the centre and left the British held their own, the 2/Grenadier Guards being now west and the Connaught Rangers east of La Cour de Soupir; but in the woods on the right the enemy steadily gained ground, and after an hour's sharp fighting had advanced to within a hundred yards of the farm. Then, however, the 3/Coldstream came up and drove them back, recovering all the lost ground. The Germans, thereupon, attempted to outflank the left of the 4th (Guards) Brigade; but the Coldstream sent a company to help the Grenadiers to foil the movement, and the position was successfully maintained. The 1/K.R.R.C. were by this time making their presence felt about La Bovette, and the rest of the 4th (Guards) Brigade was rapidly coming up. Thus, by about 2 P.M., the 2nd Division, though unable as yet to advance very far, was in firm possession of a line running, roughly speaking, from Beaulne westward to La Cour de Soupir, and thence south-west along the eastern edge of the top of the spur towards Chavonne.[1] 14 Sept. 1914.

To sum up the situation on the I. Corps front between 2 and 3 P.M.:—

The corps was successfully holding a line roughly facing north-west from the plateau of the Chemin des Dames opposite La Bovelle, through Troyon, Chivy and Beaulne, to La Cour de Soupir, and thence south-westward to the river; it had made appreciable headway and repulsed all counter-attacks with heavy loss to the enemy. The 1st Division batteries on the plateau of Paissy on the right Map 32.

[1] The opponents of the 2nd Division were the right half of the *14th Reserve Division* and part of the *6th Division*.

had come into action when the fog lifted at noon, and divided their fire between the Germans who were retiring in disorder over the Chemin des Dames and those who were assembling for a fresh attack about Chermizy (about three miles N.N.W. of Paissy) in the valley of the Ailette.

### The Centre and Left: II. and III. Corps

Maps 31 & 32. In the centre and left of the British front the situation was less satisfactory, and there was a gap of very nearly two miles between the left of the I. Corps and the right of the II. Of the 3rd Division, the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades were, it will be remembered, already on the north bank of the Aisne, their line of outposts extending from a farm called Rouge Maison (1 mile north-east of Vailly) south-west for about a mile and a half to the southern slopes of the Jouy spur, which runs down to the Aisne between the villages of Jouy on the east and Sancy on the west. The 9th Infantry Brigade held the right of this line and the 8th the left. All had orders to continue the pursuit on the 14th. At dawn the Royal Scots, of the latter brigade, advancing to take up a position on the crest of Jouy spur, came under fire at close range, the German trenches being just on the other side of the crest of the ridge. The Royal Irish came up on their right, and the 4/Middlesex on their left; and the three battalions, only some fifteen hundred strong, slowly made their way almost to the crest. The British batteries on the south bank did their best to support them; but the XL. Brigade R.F.A., which had crossed the river at Vailly soon after daylight, could find no position from which it could come into action.

For some hours the 8th Infantry Brigade clung to the ground which it had gained; and meanwhile, about 7.30 A.M., the enemy opened an attack, covered by the fire of artillery and machine guns, on the Lincolnshire and Royal Fusiliers of the 9th Infantry Brigade, to the right and left of Rouge Maison. The German trenches, which had been concealed from the Royal Fusiliers by the fog, were in fact less than six hundred yards away, and only two hundred yards beyond the crest of the ridge. The Northumberland Fusiliers were sent up to the left of the Royal Fusiliers, and the three battalions were ordered to meet the German offensive by a counter-attack. A successful advance here was particularly desirable, inas-

much as the Germans had placed batteries on the flanks of the two valleys which run down to the Aisne east and west of Vailly, and were bursting shells very accurately over the pontoon bridge by that village. 14 Sept. 1914.

Whilst the 9th Infantry Brigade was slowly forcing its way through the dripping woods against a driving mist, about 9 A.M., the Germans delivered a heavy counter-attack upon the 8th Infantry Brigade on Jouy spur, supporting it by machine-gun fire from the west; so after suffering severely the brigade, about 10 A.M., began to fall back. Urgent messages were despatched to the 7th Infantry Brigade from 3rd Divisional Headquarters to come up in support; but its commander, on nearing the pontoon bridge at Vailly, found the shell fire so heavy that he turned the head of the brigade further upstream to the damaged railway bridge, the breach in which was traversable only by a single plank. Before, however, the brigade could pass it, British soldiers were filing back over the narrow passage towards the southern bank. The 9th Infantry Brigade, upon emerging from the woods, had been received with a murderous fire from artillery and machine guns, and after enduring it for a while and attempting to entrench, the right battalion, the Lincolnshire, had given way, and the rest of the brigade had fallen back. The Royal Fusiliers, their flank being uncovered by the retirement of the Lincolnshire, had been compelled to withdraw to a sunken road just to south of Rouge Maison. The Fifth Fusiliers, whose leading company had advanced too far into the open whilst the remainder were still entangled in the woods, had been very severely handled, but rallied on the Royal Fusiliers. The Scots Fusiliers, the last reserve of the brigade, had already been thrown into the fight, half of them on the right and half on the left; and the former, being enfiladed by machine guns while toiling over heavy beetroot fields waist deep in dripping leaves, had been driven back with heavy losses.

The situation was critical, for owing to the gap between the I. and II. Corps, the right flank of the 9th Infantry Brigade was absolutely exposed; had the Germans followed up their advantage the consequences might have been serious. The western side of the Soupir spur, the valley of the Ostel west of it, and the spur between that valley and St. Précord—a space fully a mile and a half wide—was open to them. The British gunners to the south of the Aisne

were cut off from the battlefield by the mist. If the Germans could have advanced in force they would probably have outflanked and thus overwhelmed the 4th (Guards) Brigade to the east, and the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades to the west of the gap, and cut the British Army in two. There were, it is true, two regiments of the 5th Cavalry Brigade in Vailly. They had crossed the pontoon bridge in the early morning; but the fog had lifted for a time while the last regiment, the 20th Hussars, was filing over, and it had been ordered to re-cross at once to the south bank. The Scots Greys and 12th Lancers, who remained in Vailly, were under heavy and continuous shell fire. Their five or six hundred rifles might have delayed, but could hardly have averted a catastrophe.

However, whether from dread of the British guns on the heights of Chassemy, which were searching for the concealed German batteries across the river, or from the effects of his own heavy losses, the enemy made no immediate offensive movement. By 1 P.M. the 1/Wiltshire of the 7th Infantry Brigade had crossed the Aisne by the railway bridge, deployed with its right on the Vailly—Ostel road, and now, though heavily shelled on the way, hastened to the assistance of the 9th Infantry Brigade on the spur to the east of St. Précord. Thus reinforced, the brigade stood fast. At 3.30 P.M., the Irish Rifles of the 7th Infantry Brigade came up on the left of the Wiltshire, bringing the intelligence that a strong German column was moving south-eastward from Ostel. Warning of this movement was at once sent to the 4th (Guards) Brigade. The remainder of the 7th Infantry Brigade continued to pass the river; whilst the 8th Infantry Brigade fell back to the south of Jouy spur, with its right on the road that leads from Vailly to Aizy, and its left west of the chateau of Vauxelles ($\frac{3}{4}$ mile north-west of Vailly).

The 3rd Division, thus compactly drawn together, held its own without difficulty until dusk; and at 5.30 P.M. General Hamilton declared himself confident of his ability to maintain his position on the north bank of the Aisne. Nevertheless, the casualties had been serious: the 9th Infantry Brigade had lost between six and seven hundred men, and the 7th and 8th Infantry Brigades about one hundred and fifty, losses which would not have been felt so much had not the battalions been already below establishment.

As a result of the improvement in the situation, the 5th

Cavalry Brigade and the XL. Brigade R.F.A. were ordered back. The former re-crossed the pontoon bridge under heavy shell fire in single file at increased distance, a troop at a time, the passage of the bridge being kept open and controlled with the greatest coolness by Captain T. Wright, V.C., with the assistance of a party of the 57th Field Company R.E. The cavalry escaped with some forty men and half a dozen horses wounded; but Captain Wright was unfortunately killed. The three batteries, being unable to re-cross the river at Vailly, drove 5 miles up the valley to Pont Arcy, coming under fire at various points on the way, and especially at the bridge itself. Their losses were fortunately slight; but the orderliness of their retreat, as also of that of the 5th Cavalry Brigade, under such conditions, spoke highly for their discipline. 14 Sept. 1914.

### The Left Centre: 5th Division

It is now time to turn to the 5th and 4th Divisions on the left of the line. Their operations, though nominally in combination with the divisions on the right, were, as it turned out, practically distinct, owing to the barrier interposed by the promontory of Chivres. The 5th Division continued the passage of the river during the night of the 13th/14th by improvised methods, for Missy bridge was not ready and still required many hours' work before it would be serviceable. The 14th Infantry Brigade, it will be remembered, had crossed to Ste. Marguerite on the 13th September. The 15th Infantry Brigade was ferried over on rafts during the same night at Moulin des Roches (1 mile east of Venizel) and reached Ste. Marguerite by 6 A.M. on the 14th. The Royal West Kent and Scottish Borderers of the 13th Infantry Brigade likewise passed the river under cover of darkness, by means of rafts and boats, near the wrecked bridge of Missy, but their further advance was then stopped by fire, and they took such cover as they could find on the north bank. Maps 31 & 32.

The operation orders of the 5th Division for the 14th September, in accordance with higher instructions, directed the continuation of the pursuit: the 15th Infantry Brigade to march via Celles (near Condé) and thence northwards; the 14th and 13th via Missy.

It early became evident that no progress could be made so long as Chivres spur remained in the hands of the enemy. This, the highest ground on the field, with the old fort of

Condé on its summit, commands the valley on both sides of it for a considerable distance. It was arranged that the left of the 14th Infantry Brigade, with two battalions of the 13th, should attack eastward from the direction of Ste. Marguerite (which village was held by the 12th Infantry Brigade), and its right should be thrown forward so as to threaten the spur from the south. The 15th Infantry Brigade was to make its way through Missy as soon as the right of the 14th Infantry Brigade had cleared the village, and attack the spur from the south-east. The XV. Brigade R.F.A. (reduced by previous losses to two batteries of four guns apiece), together with the 37th and 61st Howitzer Batteries, was brought over the Aisne to the vicinity of Bucy le Long to support the attack.

The 14th Infantry Brigade started early, but the Germans began to burst shells in the valley near Missy, as soon as it was light. The progress of the operations was very slow. The Manchesters, on the left of the 14th Infantry Brigade, were checked by enfilade fire of artillery and machine guns from the village of Chivres and the valley above it. The battalion had, in fact, got within three hundred yards of the German trenches, but there could do little more than hold its own. The Cornwall L.I., in the centre, and the East Surreys, on the right, however, worked their way round to Missy, very slowly, for the road from Ste. Marguerite was under artillery, rifle and machine-gun fire; by noon however the East Surreys were on the northern edge of Missy village. Thence they threw out a company to feel for the West Kents and Scottish Borderers (13th Brigade) on their right. The 15th Infantry Brigade had meanwhile also moved from Ste. Marguerite, leaving the Dorsets in a sunken road north of the village. At 2.30 P.M. its head arrived at Missy, and the officer commanding the Bedfordshire at once pushed a company, in co-operation with one of the East Surreys, a considerable way up the wooded spur beyond the village, where they found only a few Germans and established themselves. As Ste. Marguerite was being heavily shelled, the remainder of the brigade was unable to reach Missy until more than an hour later; and it was 4.30 P.M. before the dispositions were completed for a final effort by the 14th and 15th Infantry Brigades to secure the crest of the spur.

The left centre of the 14th Infantry Brigade, having been absolutely stopped by the frontal fire from the enemy's trenches on the western side of the spur and by the flanking

fire from the Chivres valley, the new attack was made up the spur from the south; ten companies (including the two already on the spur)—three from the Norfolks, four from the Bedfords, of the 15th Infantry Brigade, and three from the East Surreys of the 14th Infantry Brigade, with supports from the Cheshire and Cornwall L.I.—were detailed for it. As they advanced northwards up the hill, the woods were found to be held by the enemy with an organized system of trenches protected by wire netting and fencing.[1] The companies of Bedfords and East Surreys, on the left, were the first to enter the woods; and they pressed on steadily, shooting down a good many Germans and making headway by sheer superiority of marksmanship. In fact, on the left of the attack all seemed to be going well. 14 Sept. 1914.

But on the right it was otherwise. Whether, in view of the failing light, insufficient time had been allowed for the various units to reach their several starting points, or because the wire netting in the woods caused them to converge, it is difficult to say—it is only certain that, in spite of all precautions, some companies lost direction, and that the right tended to close in on the centre, where the overcrowding and confusion became so great that few could tell in which direction they should fire, whilst both British and German guns shelled the woods. The inevitable result soon followed. Confused advance gave place to confused retirement; and Brigadier-General Count Gleichen, the senior officer on the spot, decided to abandon the attack, called back his battalions and broke off the fight.

Three companies of the East Surrey and a company of the Bedfordshire, however, still stuck to the ground which they had gained within seventy yards of the German trenches. They were still striving to push forward until, between 6 and 7 P.M., they received orders to fall back. The 15th Infantry Brigade was then re-formed south of Missy, and a line was taken up by the 14th Infantry Brigade and entrenched, starting from the left, from the eastern end of Bucy le Long across the mouth of the Chivres valley to Missy village; whence the West Kents and Scottish Borderers of the 13th Infantry Brigade prolonged it to Missy bridge. The casualties had not been heavy, but the loss of even one hundred men was a serious thing to these already depleted battalions.[2]

[1] According to Bloem, his regiment reached Chivres spur on the 12th September; so there had been plenty of time to entrench.

[2] See footnote 1, p. 357, for the German forces opposite the 5th Division.

### The Left: 4th Division

Maps 31 & 32.

West of the 5th Division, the 4th had received orders to push on northward over the plateau between Vregny and Crouy, with the double object of dislodging the German heavy guns, which from Clamecy (2 miles north of Crouy) were stopping the advance of General Maunoury's right, and of helping forward the advance of the 5th Division. By 1 A.M. on the 14th, the 10th Infantry Brigade had completed its passage of the river; and an hour later it was sent up to reinforce the 11th Infantry Brigade which, secure by its own boldness, was still occupying the line of heights from Ste. Marguerite to Crouy, a front of 3 miles. The 12th Infantry Brigade held a line on the right of the 11th. Its right was thrown back into the Chivres valley, the right flank resting on the stream about five hundred yards south of Chivres village, which was the point of junction of the 5th and 4th Divisions. Thence the line ran west-north-west over the valley to the northern edge of Ste. Marguerite spur, at a point immediately south of Vregny, and thence to the crest of the hill between Le Moncel and Ste. Marguerite. The 39th and 68th Batteries, with a section of the 88th, were in the open a little to north-east of Venizel—a position exposed to the fire of the German guns on Chivres spur, but the best that could be found. The 31st and 55th Howitzer Batteries also crossed the river about dawn and, in order to facilitate the advance of the French, moved to a position a hundred yards north-west of La Montagne Farm (north-east of Bucy le Long), and opened fire on German guns which were on the ridge about thirteen hundred yards north-west of Crouy.

The difficulty of giving any artillery support to a direct attack by the 4th Division was so great that the divisional commander[1] hesitated to commit himself to such an operation unless the 5th Division on his right or the French on his left should make a decided forward movement. The right of the French Sixth Army could not force its way beyond Crouy, nor establish itself on the plateau north of Pommiers (2 miles west of Soissons). The French had no heavy artillery comparable with that of the Germans; and immediately east and west of Soissons

[1] Brigadier-General H. F. M. Wilson; Major-General Snow had been disabled by a serious accident near La Ferté sous Jouarre.

the heights on the north bank of the Aisne are, at the nearest point, over five thousand yards distant from those on the south bank. The 5th Division, for reasons already explained, was progressing very slowly. So far as infantry was concerned the numbers facing the British 4th and 5th Divisions did not appear to be very great, though as a matter of fact the whole of the German *II. Corps* and parts of the *III.* and *IX.* were opposite to them;[1] but all approaches to the enemy's position, which was entrenched and was of great natural strength, were swept by artillery, which was in great force, and by machine guns. 14 Sept. 1914.

At daylight intermittent fire was opened on the line of the 4th Division and on its batteries; and work upon the trenches of the 10th Infantry Brigade could only be carried on at intervals, so that the shelter obtained by the battalions was, in many cases, inadequate, and among the killed was Lt.-Col. Sir E. Bradford commanding the 2/Seaforth Highlanders. At noon the fire increased so greatly that a German attack on the spur of La Montagne (west of Le Moncel) was apprehended; and a company of the Dublins was sent forward to make a counter-attack. This company advanced for half a mile, engaged hostile infantry in a beetroot field at four hundred yards' range, and by sheer marksmanship silenced its fire. This practically ended the active work of the 4th Division for the day. The casualties were slight for the most part; but the 10th Infantry Brigade lost one hundred officers and men, chiefly owing to the fact that they had been unable to dig themselves really good trenches.

## The I. Corps

The close of the I. Corps operations on the 14th September can now be shortly told. News of the repulse of the 3rd Division reached Corps Headquarters about 2 P.M.; and the serious menace which it meant to the left flank of the 2nd Division was instantly realized.[2] Not a single battalion was available in corps or divisional reserve, every one having been thrown into the fight; but the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades were at once despatched to the left, near Soupir. After an interview Maps 31 & 32.

[1] *II. Corps* held Vregny—Crouy, with the *5th Division* of the *III. Corps* east of it, on Chivres spur. Then came Kraewel's *Composite Brigade* of the *IX. Corps*, and next the *6th Division*, extending to Vailly, inclusive.

[2] See pp. 350-52.

with Brig.-General Perceval, R.A., who was in command at Soupir, Brig.-General Briggs pushed the 1st Cavalry Brigade on to Chavonne, where it arrived about 3.30 P.M. Finding the 4th (Guards) Brigade holding the village, he forthwith sent a regiment to occupy a commanding bluff west of Chavonne and the wood beyond that again, with a section to connect it with the 3rd Division. About the same time, various reports were received tending to show that the enemy was retreating, and the G.O.C. 2nd Division ordered the general advance on the main ridge to be resumed in the direction of Courtecon, the original objective. The commander of the 4th (Guards) Brigade thereupon ordered the 2/Grenadiers and the troops south-west of La Cour de Soupir [1] to advance and swing round, pivoting on that farm, so as to face northward. The Irish Guards on their right however were already in motion north-westwards in the woods which clothe the eastern side of the Soupir spur, and this enveloping movement caused about one hundred and fifty Germans, near La Cour de Soupir, to begin waving white flags. On this the British ceased fire and some of the Irish and Coldstream Guards rushed out of the woods to receive the surrender. No sooner did they show themselves in the open than a second body of Germans appeared on the sky-line and opened fire. Meanwhile, the main body of the Irish Guards, on approaching within two hundred yards of the northern edge of the woods, was checked by a storm of bullets from trenches in the open ground a hundred yards beyond it. A German counter-attack now began to develop south-eastwards from Ostel towards La Cour de Soupir; and the 2/Grenadiers and 3/Coldstream lined the road to the north of the farm, fronting north-north-west, supported by a machine gun in the farm enclosure. This position they held until dusk; but they were unable to advance further owing to the enemy on their left flank, and ultimately the bulk of the 4th (Guards) Brigade entrenched and bivouacked where it stood. Its casualties were not far short of five hundred killed and wounded.

The 6th Infantry Brigade on the right of the 4th fared little better; owing to heavy shelling, it could only just hold its own without any thought of forward movement. On its right again, Brigadier-General Haking (5th Infantry Brigade) with the 2/Highland Light Infantry and the

[1] See p. 349.

2/Worcestershire, and half the 1/K.R.R.C. of the 6th Infantry Brigade managed to advance up the eastern slopes of the Beaulne spur, and there held on. Of the two remaining battalions of the 5th Infantry Brigade, which for a time had been nominally in corps reserve, the Connaught Rangers were still with the 4th (Guards) Brigade at La Cour de Soupir, and the Oxfords near Soupir, where they had been sent by Sir Douglas Haig to assist in securing the left of his corps. 14 Sept. 1914.

On the extreme right, the situation towards evening had sensibly improved. The French XVIII. Corps had begun the day badly, for by 10 A.M. it had been severely handled, and had been driven from Craonne and Craonnelle. The French Colonial Division, immediately on the right of the British, had likewise at the outset suffered a repulse; but now the XVIII. Corps was again in possession of Craonne, and the ridge immediately to the west of it; and the Colonial Division was advancing again over the plateau of Paissy upon Les Creutes (2½ miles south-east of Cerny). The enemy was showing signs of hesitation; and Sir Douglas Haig felt that the time was come for a general forward movement of the I. Corps. The commander of the 2nd Division had as we have seen anticipated this; in the 1st Division there had been no change in the general disposition since last described, except that Lieut.-Colonel Warren of the Queen's, after sharp fighting at La Bovelle, had skilfully extricated his battalion from its dangerously advanced position, and brought it back at 4.30 P.M. to the foremost of the British guns on the Chemin des Dames. It was just about this time that Sir Douglas Haig issued orders for the general advance. It was dusk or even later before the 1st Division was under way, by which time Lieutenant-Colonel Ponsonby also had evacuated his advanced position at Cerny, and brought back his detachment, much thinned by heavy losses, into the general line. The Troyon factory also had, after heavy bombardment, been reoccupied by the Germans at dusk, and their abandoned guns had, under cover of a counter-attack, been carried off. The light was failing fast when the 3rd Infantry Brigade pushed forward between the 2nd and 5th Infantry Brigades, and carried the line forward to within three hundred yards of the Chemin des Dames, the Welch capturing a hundred prisoners and a machine gun. But, mistaking the Germans in the factory for British, the 3rd Infantry Brigade missed

its chance of recapturing that building. General Haking, when it became dusk, continued his advance over heaps of German bodies to the top of the main ridge opposite Courtecon. The 3rd and 5th Infantry Brigades, however, were never really in touch; and, in fact, General Haking, after sending out patrols, found only the enemy on either side, and judging it imprudent to remain in his forward position withdrew his two and a half battalions after dark to Verneuil and Moussy. The 3rd Infantry Brigade was left on the ground that it had so honourably won; but, on the whole, though a final effort was fully justified, no solid advantage was gained by it. With a few fresh battalions to put life into the fight, the results might have been widely different.

### Summary of the 14th September

Maps 31 & 32.

On the whole, the results of the 14th September were disappointing. The I. Corps had certainly made some progress, but at heavy cost, for its casualties amounted to three thousand five hundred. In the 1st (Guards), 2nd Infantry and 4th (Guards) Brigades, the 1/Cameron Highlanders lost six hundred officers and men, the 1/Coldstream, 1/Loyal North Lancashire and 2/Sussex, 2/Grenadiers and 3/Coldstream, each of them, over three hundred and fifty, and the 1/K.R.R.C. over three hundred. Amongst the killed was Lieut.-Colonel Adrian Grant-Duff commanding the 1/Black Watch, who fell whilst superintending the filling of a gap in the line.[1] On the rest of the line the British force was stationary; and though the casualties of the 4th and 5th Divisions were slight, those of the 3rd Division fell little short of a thousand. Moreover, the general situation of the British was very far from secure. Apart from the one and a half mile gap between the 2nd and 3rd Divisions, covered by battle outposts of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, the 5th and 4th Divisions, separated from the rest of the Army by the promontory of Chivres, held their position on the north bank of the Aisne on a most precarious tenure. The only link between the two sections of the force was the 2nd Cavalry Division (3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades), which, from a position about Chassemy,

[1] As Assistant Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence 1910–1913, he had designed and edited the "War Book" (see p. 14) and worked out the detailed co-ordination of the action to be taken by the various Government Departments on the outbreak of war.

on the south bank, watched the undestroyed bridge of Condé, to guard against a German counter-attack. Still, it was by no means certain, after the day's experience, whether the Aisne was being defended by a strong rear guard or by an enemy in position. It is known now that, but for the determined spirit of the British attack, von Bülow, who, as already mentioned, was commanding all the German Armies defending the Aisne — the *Second, Seventh and First*—, would have succeeded, as he expected, in sweeping the British across the river and securing the ground on the south bank. It would seem that here, as on other occasions in 1914, the sheer audacity of the British in attacking with small numbers imposed on the enemy, and made him believe that large reserves were behind them. Examination of prisoners and of the dead proved that the greater part of the German *VII. Reserve Corps* and at least one division of the *III. Corps*[1] had been pitted against the British I. Corps. It was plain that the British were distributed on a front far too extensive for their strength, except in defence. Practically every battalion was in the firing line, and there was no general reserve whatever. The two corps in the field (for the III. was still a corps in name only) required at least another division apiece if they were to do the work assigned to them. 14 Sept. 1914.

Again, there was no permanent bridge available over the deep and rain-swollen waters of the Aisne; and, though the Engineers had displayed characteristic energy and self-sacrifice in the laying of temporary bridges, yet these were, most of them, exposed to fire, and always in danger, owing to the nearly incessant rain, of being suddenly carried away by a flood. In any case, the greater part of the valley was open to the shells of the German artillery. On the left of the line it was impossible to establish any depots of supplies and stores on the north bank; everything required had to be brought down to the river and across it by night. At Missy, the most dangerous point of all, the supply wagons on the night of the 14th September were brought safely to within two hundred yards of the German trenches and as safely withdrawn; but frequently rations could only be brought over by hand. The wounded could not be brought in except at night; and the stretcher bearers toiled with equal courage and devotion through the hours of darkness, carrying disabled men for one or two miles over heavy soaked ground before they could

[1] Part of the *6th Division*. See also p. 409.

deliver them to a horse ambulance. Even on the south bank trains of transport were occasionally caught by the enemy's high-explosive shells—of greater calibre than any which the French or British had yet available, and fired from a range which forbade any effective reply. All ranks, however, whether of combatant or non-combatant branches, were confident of a further and immediate advance. On the enemy's side there was corresponding depression, for on the evening of the 14th September, as will be seen below, the Supreme Command issued an order for a general retirement if the *First Army* could not hold the Aisne line.

### The 14th September from the German side

Maps 3, 4 & 32.

The attack of the Allies had anticipated and prevented the execution of von Bülow's programme for driving them across the Aisne [1]—but there were many vicissitudes.

The early part of the day, according to their own accounts, was a most anxious time for the Germans: [2]—"Nothing was to be seen of the *XV. Corps*, in whose attack "the *VII. Reserve* was to co-operate; far from troops "coming on, parts of von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* "(which was to cover its advance) sent their baggage "back in the direction of Bruyères (south of Laon). They "were very exhausted. Strong bodies of cavalry followed "and took cover behind Fort Montbérault (4 miles north "of Troyon and von Zwehl's headquarters). It was "reported and seen that forces considerably stronger than "our own, as it was supposed, had crossed the Aisne, "moving northwards. The *VII. Reserve Corps* and also "the *III. Corps* felt they must confine themselves to the "defensive."

The attack of General Bulfin's two battalions against Troyon [3] was met by three battalions of the *27th Reserve Brigade*, supported by three batteries of *Reserve Field Artillery Regiment No. 14*; but just as the situation became critical for them, assistance arrived in the form of 1,200 infantry reinforcements, a company of the *78th Regiment* of the *X. Corps*, and a Horse Artillery *Abteilung* of the *9th Cavalry Division*.[4]

[1] See p. 340. [2] Zwehl, p. 71. [3] See p. 341 *et seq.*
[4] Zwehl, p. 73. According to "Deutsche Kavallerie," p. 121, the Machine-Gun Troop, Cyclist Battalion, Jäger and dismounted men of the *9th Cavalry Division* also took part.

The *27th Reserve Brigade*, however, was wavering, and reported that it was attacked by very superior force. Von Zwehl called up the *13th Reserve Division* and *III. Corps* on its right to come to its help by taking the offensive, and ordered his last reserve, the *25th Landwehr Brigade*, to its left. "Vital support was given by the two 8-inch "howitzer batteries, which were brought into action south "of Chamouille in the valley of the Ailette. The howitzers, "about 12.30 P.M., succeeded in stopping an attack "threatening the left flank of the *27th Reserve Infantry* "*Brigade*. In spite of this, affairs became more and more "critical." Between 2 and 3 P.M., two fresh battalions arrived from Maubeuge; they attempted a counter-attack, but failed to do more than assist in holding the line. 14 Sept. 1914.

Meanwhile, the *13th Reserve Division* was entrenching itself on the Chemin des Dames, north of Braye. Before 9 A.M. the corps commander ordered an attack towards Moussy, where the advance of the 2nd Division had been reported. Affairs at Troyon were, however, too critical, and at 10 A.M. the flank attack to relieve the situation was begun; this was defeated by the 1/South Wales Borderers and 2/Welch (3rd Infantry Brigade), with the assistance of the 46th and 113th Batteries.[1] The attack was carried out by three battalions and two machine-gun companies of the *25th Reserve Brigade*, and a battery. Its repulse seems to have been more complete than the British accounts indicate.[2] One battalion "had to retire with heavy losses. "The remains of it assembled under the steep slope, south "of Courtecon." The other two battalions "were com-"pelled to give up their positions, as the companies had "got thoroughly mixed up. . . . They assembled on the "reverse slope between Malval Farm (1 mile west of "Courtecon) and Courtecon. The brigade commander was "mortally wounded."

The other brigade (*28th Reserve*, 4 battalions) of the *13th Reserve Division* made a short advance to Braye, where it had the fire fight already described with the 6th Infantry Brigade. "At 4 P.M. came the information that the left "wing of the *III. Corps* (which apparently had attacked "the 4th (Guards) Brigade near Soupir) was going back. "At dusk the *28th Reserve Brigade* retired to the position "it had held in the morning."

Turning now to what was happening in front of the

[1] See p. 344. [2] Zwehl, p. 76.

French XVIII. Corps on the British right: the German *28th* (*Active*) *Brigade* of the *14th Reserve Division* at Craonne and the *2nd Cavalry Division* of von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* on its left were being roughly handled and driven back, when the *XV. Corps* appeared just in time to save them from destruction. The corps which thus came to the rescue had been brought by rail from Alsace. After a delay at Brussels, where part of it was detained from two to four days on account of the sortie from Antwerp,[1] it detrained at Busigny and marched to St. Quentin, the assembly area of the *Seventh Army*, which its leading troops reached on the 12th September. It was immediately ordered east by von Heeringen. Early on the 13th it continued its march through La Fère to near Laon, and thence on the 14th to the left of the *VII. Reserve Corps*. The leading division reached Corbeny and the line of battle and deployed about 2 P.M. on the 14th. Its sister division eventually came up on its left. At 2.30 P.M. von Bülow, quite unnecessarily, issued an order that they were not to cross the Aisne.[2]

The arrival of another corps, intact and up to strength, from a quiet part of the front, and of two rested battalions from Maubeuge, put new life into the exhausted divisions of the *VII. Reserve Corps*, and, as already narrated, a counter-attack on the whole front of the Chemin des Dames resulted in the French and British being driven back from their advanced positions to the southern slopes of the ridge. But there still remained a gap of three or four miles between von Bülow's right and the *Seventh Army*, of which General Maud'huy (XVIII. Corps) was endeavouring to take advantage. To parry this blow von Bülow had collected reinforcements to nearly the strength of a division under General Steinmetz, and the Supreme Command ordered westward the *XII. Corps* from the *Third Army*. By midday on the 14th, the advanced guard of this corps was at Warmeriville (12 miles east of Berry au Bac) where orders from von Bülow reached it to send on its artillery and cavalry without delay to assist Steinmetz and then continue its march eastwards.[3] The *Guard* and *2nd Cavalry Divisions* were also brought from the British front eastward to the gap. Thus reinforced the German line not only held its own opposite the French but made

[1] See p. 322.

[2] Zwehl, p. 75.

[3] Its advanced guard reached the line of battle about three miles north-east of Berry au Bac at 6 A.M. next day.

some advance and established itself on the high ground north of the Aisne, north-east of Berry au Bac. The situation had been critical, for the *VII. Corps*, the right of the German *Second Army*, had put into the fight every man it possessed except its last reserve battalion. 14 Sept. 1914.

On the night of the 14th/15th the dispositions of the German forces in front of the British Army and the left of the French Fifth Army, from west to east were: *II. Corps*, Crouy to Vregny; *III. Corps* thence to Ostel; *VII. Reserve Corps* and *9th Cavalry Division* thence to Craonnelle; the above, except the *28th* (*Active*) *Brigade* (the left of the *VII. Reserve Corps*), supported by a brigade of the *IX. Corps* and various small reinforcements, covered the British front.

Then came in succession the *XV. Corps*, *Guard* and *2nd Cavalry Divisions*, Steinmetz's *Division* supported by the *XII. Corps*, and the *VII. Corps*. These troops effectively closed the gap between the German *First* and *Second Armies* and it was now as strongly held as any other part of the line. There was little hope of driving the Allies back, but the crisis was completely over. Only on the extreme right of the line was there any anxiety. There, although von Kluck stated he could hold his front, he had withdrawn his right flank to prevent envelopment from the direction of Compiègne. The Supreme Command in consequence sent off the following instructions to von Bülow which were received during the night of the 14th/15th.

"If the *First Army* cannot hold the Aisne Valley, it should "retire in good time (*rechtzeitig*) in the general direction of "La Fère behind the river valley. In this case, the *Second* and "*Seventh Armies* will hold the line Laon—Rheims."[1]

But no such action was found necessary.

Possibly, this was the last order issued under the authority of von Moltke, for on the evening of the 14th September, Lieut.-General von Falkenhayn, then Minister of War, was entrusted with the duties of the Chief of the Staff of the Field Army in his place, although the change was not immediately made known.[2]

### Situation on the night 14th September

The situation of the British troops on the night of the 14th/15th September was as follows:— Maps 31 & 32.

[1] Bülow, p. 71.

[2] Falkenhayn, p. 1.

I. Corps : right on the Chemin des Dames, 4 miles from the Aisne ; left almost on the Aisne near Chavonne.

1st Division : From a point on the Chemin des Dames about 1,000 yards east of Troyon factory, south-west behind the factory, over the ridge to Mont Faucon and into the valley south of Chivy, with two advanced detachments at the head of the Chivy valley.

4th Cavalry Brigade : Paissy and Geny (south of Paissy), behind the junction of French and British armies.

2nd Division : From the southern end of Beaulne spur, across the Braye valley to the vicinity of La Bovette, and thence, by La Cour de Soupir, to Point 166 just north of Chavonne.

1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades : Connecting the I. and II. Corps ; from point 166 to the mill midway between Chavonne and Vailly.

II. Corps : in two portions, barely across the river, with a gap of 3½ miles between them.

3rd Division : From the mill aforesaid, north-west to Rouge Maison, thence with the Aisne south-west to Vauxelles Chateau and the confluence of the stream which runs southward from Aizy.

5th Division : From Missy westward to Ste. Marguerite. Two battalions of the 13th Infantry Brigade south of the Aisne about Sermoise (south-east of Missy).

III. Corps : on the edge of the main ridge.

4th Division : From Ste. Marguerite north-west to La Montagne Farm, thence westward to Point 151 (east of Crouy).

19th Infantry Brigade : South of the Aisne about Venizel.

3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades : on the south bank of the Aisne, Chassemy southward to Augy.

On the right of the British, the French Fifth Army had at first made good progress towards forcing back the western flank of the German *Second Army*, but was faced by an ever increasing volume of artillery fire ; its XVIII. Corps, on the left, endeavouring to secure the eastern end of the Chemin des Dames ridge, was heavily counter-attacked at Craonnelle by the *XV. Corps* of the German *Seventh Army*. Towards evening however the situation had improved. The I. Corps occupied Rheims. Between the I. and XVIII. were the III. Corps, on the Aisne—Marne Canal, and Valabrègue's group of Reserve divisions near Berry au Bac.[1] Thus the French line ran almost

[1] This group according to M. Madelin (" Revue des Deux Mondes " 1918, pp. 820-821) was heavily attacked and could not progress beyond the Aisne. It therefore left the XVIII. Corps " en l'air."

straight from Rheims to Craonnelle, everywhere in contact with the enemy. Nearest the British were the Algerian troops of the XVIII. Corps in echelon to their right rear. 15 Sept. 1914.

On the left of the British, the French Sixth Army was across the Aisne from Soissons to Attichy (3 miles west of Vic), with its extreme left 7 miles N.N.E. of the last named place, at Nampcel; but it also had encountered a well-entrenched enemy, and was unable to make the decisive progress against the German flank for which General Joffre had hoped.

### 15th September: The Deadlock

Operation orders for the 15th September issued from G.H.Q. only contained information as to the situation,[1] but the Commander-in-Chief, at a personal interview at his headquarters at Fère en Tardenois with the commanders of the II. and III. Corps, and the Brigadier-General General Staff of the I. Corps, at 11 P.M., on the 14th, ordered all troops to entrench on the positions they occupied. He dwelt on the importance of concentrating the heavy guns of the five divisions in turn on the heavy batteries of the enemy, and instructed the I. Corps, without committing itself in any way, to render what assistance it could to the 3rd Division (which was barely across the river) by gun fire or infantry demonstration. Sir John French was confirmed in his view of the situation by the receipt at 1.15 A.M. of the following telegram addressed by General Joffre to his Army commanders:— Sketch 7. Maps 31 & 33.

"It seems as if the enemy is once more going to accept "battle, in prepared positions north of the Aisne. In con- "sequence, it is no longer a question of pursuit, but of a "methodical attack, using every means at our disposal and "consolidating each position in turn as it is gained."

There was, however, little opportunity of carrying these intentions into effect: the 15th was a day of German attacks, but the British were able to repel them all successfully, maintaining their position and inflicting severe loss on the enemy. The Royal Flying Corps rendered great assistance, for, though there were showers during the day, there was no heavy rain until night. Photographs were for the first time taken of the enemy's positions; most of his batteries were located, and considerable success was

[1] Appendix 48.

achieved in assisting the ranging of the artillery. From the few movements of troops behind the German lines little could be gathered for certain, though the reports of large empty bivouacs and movements of trains northwards, and of troops moving into massed formations north of Pancy (north of Courtecon) [1] still seemed to indicate retirement. It is now known that von Bülow's orders for the 15th September were as regards the British front :—

" The *Seventh Army* will throw the enemy in front of it " back over the Aisne, and will support the *First Army*." [2] But the spirit of the Germans was evidently exhausted, for their feeble advance hardly deserved the name of attack. Even their commander can say no more than that " their progress was slow."

Von Kluck, for his part, repeated his orders to the *First Army* to continue the entrenching of its positions and to hold them at all costs.[3]

The 15th was by no means a day of inaction for the British. In the 3rd Division, the 7th Infantry Brigade, discovering soon after daylight that Germans were entrenching themselves between La Fosse Marguet (1 mile north-east of Vailly) and La Rouge Maison (1¼ miles N.N.E. of Vailly), attempted with two companies of the Irish Rifles to clear them out of a wood between these two points. The attack was repulsed with severe loss. Still German attacks or demonstrations on the line of the 3rd Division were all beaten back by rifle and machine-gun fire alone, and the situation remained unchanged. Vailly bridge was in spite of considerable shelling made passable for all traffic except heavy artillery. The 3rd Division, it may be noted, was on this day strengthened by the arrival of the 1/Devons, which replaced the remnant of the 1/Gordon Highlanders in the 8th Infantry Brigade.

Further west a final endeavour was made by the 5th Division to gain the Chivres spur. The 14th and 15th Infantry Brigades were ordered to renew their attacks from the south and south-west over the same ground as on the previous day, whilst the 13th Infantry Brigade, including the two battalions still on the south bank, struck in simultaneously from the south-east. The 2/Duke of Wellington's were therefore brought over the river at Missy on pontoon rafts, but suffered not a little from German high-explosive shells while approaching and crossing the

[1] Probably the *2nd Cavalry Division* moving eastwards.
[2] Bülow, p. 73. [3] Kluck, p. 141.

river. The Yorkshire Light Infantry also suffered considerably; it did not pass the river, as the rafts for it were not ready in time. About 8 A.M. the Norfolks of the 15th Brigade led the advance, with the Bedfords in support and the remainder of the brigade in reserve, over the same ground as on the 14th September but on a narrower front. It was soon discovered however that the Germans had thrown up new defences in the woods, and there was half an hour's pause during which the British batteries searched them. The ground before the 15th Infantry Brigade was at best very unfavourable, for the open country ran up into a wooded re-entrant. Advancing once more, the Norfolks were stopped by a wire-netting fence six feet high, through which there was but one entrance. Wirecutters were to hand, but the task of making a gap was long and tedious; and the density of the undergrowth made a flanking attack extremely difficult. A few outlying Germans were shot down by flanking parties; but the attack made no progress and gradually came to a standstill. In the 14th Infantry Brigade, the Cornwall Light Infantry had orders to advance up the valley in touch with the 15th Infantry Brigade and with its left on the Missy—Vregny road; the 2/Manchester on the western side of the Cornwall Light Infantry was to advance as soon as the latter's progress enabled it to do so. But the Germans on the end of the Chivres spur offered a stout resistance; the advance was therefore stopped, and artillery support called for. At 11 A.M. Brigadier-General Rolt of the 14th Infantry Brigade, was placed in command of all troops of the 5th Division on the northern bank of the Aisne. Meanwhile, the 13th Infantry Brigade found it impossible to move along the road towards Condé, which was swept by the German artillery, and could not therefore reach its assigned position to assail the Chivres spur from the south-east. Thus, the whole movement was checked. The rear battalions of the 15th Infantry Brigade and the Cornwall Light Infantry of the 14th became crowded together in Missy; and a German aeroplane, passing over the village, took note of this congestion. At 10 A.M. the German artillery poured such a storm of shells upon the houses that the battalions were compelled for a time to evacuate the village. Gradually they returned to their original places in front of it, always under harassing fire from German snipers at the edge of the wood; and there they remained until dark. It was then found that there were

15 Sept. 1914.

far too many men crowded together in the small space; and the 15th Infantry Brigade was ordered to recross to the south bank of the river, where a temporary bridge was now available. Between 11 P.M. and midnight the Germans bombarded Missy heavily and for a short period caused some confusion; but after a trying time the troops settled down in the positions ordered under the new arrangement. The 15th Infantry Brigade successfully completed its passage of the river just before the first streak of dawn on the 16th.

The casualties were not serious, though the Yorkshire Light Infantry paid for its unprofitable march down to the bank of the Aisne with fifty killed and wounded. But it now seemed established beyond doubt that the capture of the promontory of Chivres was beyond the strength of the British force.

In the I. Corps the infantry had a comparatively quiet day. There were repeated outbursts of shelling from field and heavy guns, which caused some losses among the artillery horses and disabled one field gun; and some small attacks by the enemy's infantry, which were beaten off without difficulty. Advantage was taken of the comparative quiet to begin the construction of a very complete system of bridges and communication across the river and canal, as the enemy had spent a great deal of ammunition the previous day in trying to damage the canal bridges at Vieil Arcy and Bourg.

In the 4th Division there was no change in the situation, and the day was spent in improving the trenches and collecting wire from the fences of the country round, which was converted at night into entanglements; for except what the Field Companies carried, no barbed wire nor other engineer stores were yet available.

Right and left of the British, the French had also been unable to advance. Eastward the French XVIII. Corps in the afternoon lost Craonne and Craonnelle as a result of the arrival of German reinforcements [1] after most gallant and strenuous fighting. The gap which had existed between the German *First* and *Second Armies* was now completely closed and all chance of turning the western flank of the *Second Army* had disappeared. Westward the French Sixth Army could make no progress along the line

[1] On the 15th the German *XVIII. Corps* from the *Fourth Army* arrived, in addition to the *VII. Reserve*, *XV.* and *XII. Corps* already mentioned.

of the Aisne. Though there had been great hopes that the French IV. Corps might turn the right of the *First Army* at Nampcel (about thirteen miles north-east of Compiègne) the enemy offered stubborn resistance in that quarter, and in addition he had been reinforced.[1] The French General Staff was now satisfied that the Germans intended to stand on the Aisne. In rear of the river there was now no doubt that the troops who had been shaken by their defeat at the battle of the Marne, reinforced by fresh divisions, were resting and refitting. It was becoming clear that, if any immediate progress were to be made by either side, it must be by turning movements rather than by frontal attack. Everything pointed to the probability, if not the certainty, of a deadlock on the line of the Aisne, which could only be resolved by a decisive action on the one open flank towards the west. For the moment the French General Staff hoped that it might be beforehand with the enemy in this; for the district west of the Oise, from Compiègne to Montdidier, was now reported fairly clear of Germans who, to all appearances, were steadily retiring. But meanwhile it was essential to hold the enemy to his ground on the existing front. 15 Sept. 1914.

There was actually better reason for the optimistic views of the French than was afforded by the information then available. Von Kluck on receiving the reinforcements of the *IX. Reserve Corps* and *7th Cavalry Division*, already mentioned, forthwith began an operation to clear his flank by an offensive movement. These operations were by no means to the taste of von Bülow, who apparently feared that the *First Army* would repeat the fatal manœuvre it had made towards the Ourcq, and that he would no sooner have filled one gap than von Kluck would make another. He forbade the operation, and his principal interest during the 15th September seems to have been to secure that it was stopped. It is typical of the relations of these two commanders that, although von Kluck had been temporarily placed under von Bülow, the latter had to appeal to the Supreme Command to enforce obedience to his orders.

[1] The *7th Cavalry Division* from Alsace and the *IX. Reserve Corps* from Antwerp arrived on the 15th. The place of the latter was taken by *Landwehr*.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LAST DAYS ON THE AISNE

### General Strategic Situation

(See Sketches 1, 7 & 8; Maps 2, 3, 4, 31, 33 & 34)

Sketch 1. Map 2

With the stand of the Germans on the Aisne, where they filled up the great gap which had existed in their line during the battle of the Marne, and the successful defence of the French Armies in Lorraine against all attacks, an entirely new strategic situation arose. With this it seems desirable to deal before proceeding to describe the further operations on the Aisne, for it is the key to the events with which the remainder of this volume is concerned.

The front of the French Armies on the right of the British, though fighting continued sporadically, was by the middle of September practically stabilized on the ground where it was to remain so long, with the one exception that a weak place in the line of the Third Army gave an opportunity in the third week of September to German troops from Metz to push in and secure the St. Mihiel salient. Thus the eastern wing of each belligerent force became, so to say, anchored, and as the outer flanks rested on Switzerland, they could not be turned on that side. The western flank both of the Allies and the Germans, on the contrary, lay perfectly open; it was therefore still possible to continue the enveloping movements which both sides had in turn attempted, with the result, it is true, of gain of ground and prisoners, but hitherto without decisive success.

There were, however, other good and weighty reasons for pursuing operations on the western flank. In the great interval between the Oise and the Dutch frontier lay objectives of the highest importance to both sides. The Channel ports were practically defenceless; only a

few scattered French Territorial battalions about Péronne, Douai, and Lille interposed between them and the German Armies. General von Falkenhayn has said: "It still "seemed possible, providing the present German front "held, to bring the northern coast of France and therefore "the control of the English Channel into German posses-"sion."[1] Turning to the other side, the German communications were in danger: "the only line of supply of "any use to the greater part of the western half of the "German Armies was the railway leading from Belgium "into the St. Quentin district. This was almost wholly "unprotected against enemy attacks."[2] Hence, an extension of the front to the west was imperative for each of the belligerent parties, both on offensive and defensive grounds. Further, it was of the utmost importance to the Allies to re-establish connection with the Belgian Army which was still holding out in Antwerp, to secure Lille, and to cover the Bethune coalfields. Mid-Sept. 1914.

In the latter half of September, therefore, both belligerents began to make preparations for extending their lines westwards and northwards by withdrawing troops from other parts of the front. Each cherished hopes of enveloping the open flank of the other, and of rolling up his line, and each in the meantime endeavoured by attacking on the old front to hold his foe to his ground and prevent him transferring forces to the vital flank.

The failure of the French Sixth Army to turn the open right flank of the German line during the advance from the Ourcq to the Aisne and during the first days of the fighting on the Aisne had not altered General Joffre's determination to persist in operations to that end. He had already brought the XIII. Corps from the First Army to reinforce the Sixth, and other corps and all available cavalry were soon to follow. But he was careful on the 17th September, in Special Instruction No. 29, to point out that "it is "essential to maintain an offensive attitude in order to "keep the enemy under threat of attack and thus prevent "him from disengaging and transferring portions of his "forces from one point to another." On the 18th September he informed Sir John French that "the general "offensive would be resumed as soon as a new Army that "he was concentrating in the west was in a position to "move forward."

To the German Supreme Command the danger to the

[1] Falkenhayn, p. 13. [2] Falkenhayn, p. 12.

western flank of the Armies was naturally patent, even if the commander of the German *First Army* had not failed to bring it to notice. On the 15th September he reported that his "westward communications were in danger; "enemy column of all arms moving from Clermont reached "Compiègne at noon." He received instructions that "in the event of the right flank of the *First Army* being imperilled, the Army will withdraw due north."

On the evening of the 15th September General von Falkenhayn took over the duties of the Chief of the General Staff, as already stated. He thus appreciated the situation: "The danger of an effective outflanking movement "was threatening from the far bank of the Oise. The "German right flank which rested on this river was in the "air, without any reserves worth mentioning behind it. "There was definite information that the enemy was continuing the movement of strong forces westwards. The "question whether or no it would be expedient to facilitate "the German operations by withdrawing the front and "thus rendering the enemy's attempt at envelopment "more difficult was negatived."[1] General von Falkenhayn "took immediate steps to prevent the continuance of the "movements of French troops round to the western flank "by ordering counter-attacks along the whole front," principally along the Aisne front and east and west of Rheims. Many of these attacks fell, as will be narrated, on the British Army. But "they did not produce the "hoped-for results, and the attempt to prevent or divert "the movement of enemy troops was unsuccessful."

## The Beginning of Trench Warfare

Sketch 7. Map 31.

Sir John French's operation orders for the 16th September ordered the line held by the Army to be strongly entrenched.[2] He still, however, had hopes of being able to push forward eventually and added that it was his intention to assume a general offensive at the first opportunity. His orders proved to be the official notification of the commencement of trench warfare. Next day with the same proviso as before he ordered the line to be strengthened by every available means; and thenceforward, the general situation remaining unaltered, the daily issue of operation orders ceased, and they were prepared only when some considerable change in the situation or a projected

[1] Falkenhayn, p. 9.

[2] Appendix 49.

attack made them necessary. To those at the front, however, the days on the Aisne seemed a continuous battle which might at any moment develop into a decisive operation and end the war; the apathy of trench warfare had not yet set in on either side. Artillery fire, though intermittent, never ceased for long. By day, sniping made it impossible to move about or to work except under cover; constant vigilance was required to detect enemy infantry attacks in good time. Night was livelier even than day, and was made almost as bright at times by the enemy's flares and light balls; but during darkness working parties and supplies came up, patrols were continually on the move and reliefs were carried out. 16 Sept. 1914.

There was nothing novel in two armies thus facing each other, entrenched and adding daily to their defences. After the Russo-Japanese war a few writers had forecast that the next war on the Continent would be one of "siege "warfare in the field,"[1] and, but for the doctrine of the offensive at all costs, held by both the French and German General Staffs, and the generally accepted theory that a war must, for financial and industrial considerations, be short, they had good reason on their side. Measuring the Franco-German frontier as about one hundred and sixty miles in length, or three hundred and twenty miles with the Franco-Belgian frontier added, and counting the heads of the trained men available in the belligerent countries, there were on both sides, for the shorter frontier some 30,000 men, and for the longer nearly 15,000 men, per mile available, nearly twenty or ten to the yard as the case might be. These, entrenched, were ample to hold all national territory—for 2,000 to 4,000 men a mile was the usual estimate for the requirements of a modern fortress—, and to provide an enormous reserve to break through at any selected spot.

It is unnecessary to recall the fortified lines of ancient campaigns, when lack of communications made the possession of certain routes indispensable and caused turning movements to be slow and difficult. Operations of those days, if only from lack of railway and other means of rapid transport, have nothing in common with those of modern warfare. In the American Civil War 1861–65 entrenchments were extensively used by both sides, and after the failure of Grant to force Lee's breastworks in the Wilderness there had been the long period—nine and a half

[1] *E.g.* "The Campaign of the Future," by Captain (now Lieut.-Colonel) C. E. P. Sankey, D.S.O., R.E., in the "R.E. Journal," January 1907.

months, 16th June 1864 to 2nd April 1865—of deadlock in the trenches of the Petersburg lines. This genuine trench warfare ended only because the gradual extension of the lines westwards made it impossible for the Confederates to man the trenches in sufficient strength, and they were forced to abandon them, in the hope of keeping the war going elsewhere.

Passing over the extraordinary results obtained by entrenched troops at Plevna in 1877–8, we find that in the Russo-Japanese war, twenty-six years later, both sides took to the spade, and in the four months on the Sha Ho (15th October 1904 to 27th February 1905), assisted by experiences gained at Port Arthur, developed trench warfare to a very high degree.

In the Balkan war the victorious Bulgarians were stopped before the Tchataldja Lines, which they could not turn; the lines it is true had been magnificently sited in the leisure of peace, but were little better than earthworks.

It is remarkable, therefore, that none of the belligerents entered the war prepared for trench warfare on a large scale. Digging had been encouraged by precept in the British Army, but, owing to the rapidity of the course of peace manœuvres, was seldom possible in practice, except on the oft-dug-over soil of the tiny portion of the training ground allotted for the purpose. General Lanrezac has written that so opposed to entrenching was French doctrine in 1914, that when he ordered his corps to dig in before the battle of Charleroi, some evaded the order, and others, to satisfy the written word, threw up just a *bourrelet* of earth: a parapet about the size of a window sand-bag, as an Englishman would say.

The Germans naturally had not trained their troops for, and did not expect position warfare, since, as has been already pointed out, their General Staff believed that the decision in France would be reached in 36 to 40 days. They had however prepared for and held exercises in the accelerated attack of fortifications,[1] with a view to dealing quickly with those of Eastern France, or at any rate pretending that they were in a position to do so. They had very carefully studied the Russo-Japanese war from this point of view; and September 1914 found them equipped with heavy guns,[2] trench mortars, rifle-grenades, hand-

[1] *E.g.* at Coblenz in 1908.

[2] 21-cm. (8-inch) howitzers reached the Aisne on the 14th September. Von Zwehl, p. 74.

grenades, searchlights, illuminating pistols and periscopes, designed for the attack of fortresses, but practically comprising all the apparatus of trench warfare. Though, as the German record states,[1] these instruments "in their "present form are war-children grown large and perfected "in the storms and troubles of the times, yet they had been "so far developed in peace that the German Army in "August 1914 achieved great success with them against "the Belgian fortresses." As the Germans relied on the suddenness of the attack and never contemplated lengthy operations, such matters as sound ranging, flash spotting and camouflage[2] were absent from their original conception. Of the desirability of scattering batteries, magazines, observation stations, strong points and keeps, and interspersing them with dummies, so as to offer a multiplication of small targets, the Germans were fully cognizant; they had for many years avoided building concrete shell-traps like the self-contained detached forts designed after the war of 1870–71 by Brialmont and Séré de Rivière. The precise nature of shelter necessary to resist heavy artillery had also been decided on.[3] Such matters had been exhaustively studied in the design and lay-out of the German *Feste*, the super-fortresses of Metz, Thionville, Strasbourg, etc. The arrangement of these permanently fortified areas was, as far as the means available permitted, imitated in field warfare at the front; thus in the course of time the German field defences developed on a definite plan into broad fortified zones. Sept. 1914.

At the beginning therefore the enemy was at a great advantage in his knowledge of trench warfare; and he had the material required for its practice, even if his men had not been generally trained in its use.[4] The improvisation by the British Army of trench warfare implements whilst waiting for them to be manufactured and supplied from home will be told in a later volume of this history; the only

[1] "Die Technik im Weltkriege," by Generalleutnant Schwarte.

[2] Generalmajor von Gleich in "Die alte Armee," p. 19, says, "as "regards concealment from aeroplanes, we had learnt as good as nothing "(in peace). Even in the war we followed halting and hesitating behind "our adversaries. 'Camouflage' we actually only learnt from the "English after our losses had made us wise."

[3] The ferro-concrete shellproofs at Tsingtau "which perfectly resisted all calibres up to and including the 28 cm. howitzers" were 1·5 metres (5 feet) thick: that is to say the thickness of the pill boxes and other concrete shelters used in France (see "Der Kampf um Tsingtau," pp. 57 and 194).

[4] The first German train load of engineer stores for siege warfare arrived on the Aisne on 14th September. Vogel, p. 111.

engineer stores that reached it on the Aisne, beyond what the Engineer companies and bridging trains carried, were small quantities of barbed wire and sandbags, and the only heavy artillery that arrived (apart from the 60-pdrs. which formed part of the divisional artillery) were four batteries of old pattern 6-inch howitzers.

The British could at first do little more than dig cover. Fortunately for them the soil on the slopes of the Aisne valley and on the plateau was easy, and as long as they were in the Aisne district—that is to say before the first frosts—the sides of the trenches, except in one sector of the II. Corps area, stood vertical without revetment; in fact they stood so well that it was even possible to obtain additional cover by undercutting the sides in the South African fashion, thus forming the first "funk holes." The trenches dug at this period were rarely continuous, usually a succession of pits capable of holding a few men. Generally, they were of the narrow type, eighteen inches to two feet wide, with tiny traverses, three to six feet wide. These days were afterward spoken of in jest as the "Augustan Period" (August 1914) of field fortification. The narrow trenches, though giving good cover, proved the graves of some of the defenders, for men were occasionally buried alive in them. In siting fire trenches, when a choice was possible, concealment from the direct observation of hostile artillery became the most important factor; on the slopes of the Aisne valley an extensive field of fire was out of the question, and it soon became evident that a short one, flanked by machine guns, was in reality more effective.

The enemy on the Aisne seemed by his shooting to have such accurate information as to movements of troops and positions of batteries, that it was for some time suspected that he was being assisted by spies; but experience went to show that the results were due rather to the enterprise of his artillery observers. In one case a German disguised as a farmer was found with a telephone in a house between the lines in direct communication with his countrymen. Several others were caught actually inside the British lines connected by the field telegraph wire to their batteries. One with a week's supply of food was found inside a haystack; another who was concealed in a tree, on being detected by an officer looking up, promptly dropped upon him and, stunning him, escaped.

As regards our own artillery, the difficulties of effectively

employing the batteries on the plateau south of the Aisne were at first almost insuperable. In order that they might be defiladed from direct view they were necessarily placed well back from the edge of the heights, where they were four thousand yards or even further from the trenches of the British infantry. In the case of the 3rd Division, however, it was impossible to find positions on the north side of the river. Guns that were visible to ground observation were at once silenced by the German heavy howitzers, and the positions of those which could be approximately identified by their flashes or by aerial observation, were often subjected to a fire which compelled the withdrawal of the detachments. The British field howitzers were occasionally able to reach the German guns, but for the most part only the 60-pdr. batteries were of sufficient power and range to deal with them. 18 Sept. 1914.

On the 18th September, however, the redistribution of the British aeroplanes and their equipment with wireless enabled the British batteries to reply more effectively to the German. The system of maintaining forward observers was also extended, though the distance of the heavy guns to the rear, the interposition of the river and the incessant fire of the enemy made the laying and maintenance of telephone cables a difficult and dangerous matter; they were continually cut and the labour of repairing them never ceased. Communication was hampered also by the casualties among trained men and by the instruments getting out of order.

As the final weeks on the Aisne witnessed mainly artillery combats and no distinctive battle, some description of the normal conditions of such fighting as did take place may be given here.

In every division an aeroplane with an artillery officer as an observer, went up early each day.[1] The observer noted down the positions of German batteries on a squared map, and sent this map to the divisional artillery commander who settled which objectives his batteries could best engage. When any part of our infantry line was shelled, the batteries most capable of bringing fire to bear on the hostile guns were immediately ordered to search their position. Each "group" of guns and howitzers was under an artillery lieutenant-colonel who was responsible for supporting his portion of the infantry line

[1] The first occasion on which British batteries worked with aeroplanes in war appears to have been the 13th September 1914.

in case of attack, and was in touch with the infantry brigadier concerned. At certain preconcerted times, a general bombardment by all our batteries was carried out over the whole position of the Germans; our aeroplanes observed this fire, and sent corrections to each group.

Throughout the long series of encounters on the Aisne, the British had the greatest difficulty in finding observation stations, and in maintaining communication between them and the batteries. The Chemin des Dames, being the highest ridge in the neighbourhood, completely defiladed the German positions; for after the first two days, no British soldier overlooked the valley behind it, and it made direct observation impossible, except on a few German infantry trenches; these were dealt with by batteries near the front line. Practically all shooting was done by the map, and ranges, switches and angles of sight were calculated from measures taken from maps.

Attempts were at first made to observe from buildings and sheds, but these were usually knocked down very quickly or set on fire. There remained haystacks and "dug-outs" in the open. These gave cover from view, and deep trenches made near them on the side away from the enemy provided shelter from shrapnel and from machine-gun and rifle fire, but not from heavy shell, which either destroyed them or blew them in. A party of observers did remain nine days in a haystack near the Tour de Paissy, and this only once received a direct hit, though many heavy shells burst close to it. Every precaution had to be taken to prevent any movement from being visible from the front, such as making all orderlies and messengers stop and wait, if possible, one hundred yards short of observation posts, and insisting on absolute immobility when aeroplanes were near.

All batteries were carefully entrenched, covered from view by bushes and straw; dummy batteries were made, and teams sent back, as a rule, at least a mile to cover. "Funk holes" were generally to be found ready made in the numerous caves, to which detachments ran when serving their guns became impossible owing to hostile fire, remaining there until the shelling slackened. Replacement of ammunition was generally carried out by hand.

Any change of position found desirable was made during darkness, after reconnaissance had been previously carried out during daylight. Dummy guns made with hop-

poles, branches, etc., were left in the old positions when they were vacated. Sept. 1914.

The deep mud made " switching " for change of target a matter of much labour, and any change of over 15° was impossible. The guns were left at night under a guard, with sufficient men and officers within call to work them in case of attack. Night lines were carefully marked before dark; lamps were used as aiming points, and electric torches employed to read range dials when the batteries were actually firing.

A great many different kinds of shell were fired by the German heavy howitzers. The high-explosive shell burst with a tremendous concussion, and made craters 15-20 feet across and 10 feet deep. Their high-explosive shrapnel, however, though it made a terrific noise, and produced much green and white smoke, was comparatively harmless. Ordinary shrapnel was generally burst too high to be dangerous. A small high-velocity gun shell (" whizz-bang ") was very accurate, the burst and report of discharge being practically simultaneous.

Besides using forward observers inside our lines, as already mentioned, the Germans observed artillery fire by means of:

1. Captive sausage-shaped balloons. These were generally kept low and well out of range.

2. Observation posts very near our trenches such as the " Chimney " at the sugar factory on the Chemin des Dames, ½ mile north-west of Troyon. This erection, though continually fired on and suffering many direct hits, was never actually demolished.

3. Aeroplanes which continually flew over the whole battle front. If any of our troops moved or any guns fired when these were overhead and able to observe, an accurate heavy crossfire was opened almost at once by the German artillery.

The canal, villages, bridges, and all railways and routes behind our positions were methodically searched by shell each day. Headquarters and roads on which it was known that supplies and ammunition must move received special attention from the enemy.

Nevertheless, the British gunners made their presence felt by the enemy; and the second week of the new warfare saw them competing on less uneven terms with the Germans. The arrival on the 23rd September of the brigade of old pattern 6-inch howitzers tended to reduce

the disparity between them, but only to a small degree, for these weapons were of course far inferior to the enemy's 8-inch howitzers. In the matter of anti-aircraft guns, the British ordnance also fell far behind the German. For this service, light quick-firing guns known as pom-poms were sent out from England early in September. It is sufficient to say that they fired a percussion shell, which, as not one in several hundred ever hit its aerial target, fell to earth, frequently at some point in the British lines, and there burst. Not a single enemy aeroplane was brought down at this period, either by these guns or by rifle fire. Such a state of things, it is needless to say, was neither reassuring nor comfortable.

It remains before proceeding to the narrative of the operations to survey the all-important work accomplished in bridging the Aisne. On the 13th and 14th five pontoon bridges in all were built by the Engineers: at Bourg, Pont Arcy, Vailly, Venizel, and a mile above Venizel (those at Vailly and Venizel being of mixed construction, partly pontoon and partly barrel piers). In addition to these, the damaged aqueduct at Bourg and the road bridge at Venizel were repaired. On the 15th a barge bridge and a trestle bridge were completed over the canal near Bourg, and on the 17th a new pontoon bridge was laid at Bourg, the repair of the permanent bridge being simultaneously taken in hand. By the 20th two more bridges at Moulin des Roches and Missy, respectively, and a foot-bridge below Venizel had been constructed; a damaged German trestle bridge at Chavonne had also been restored. On the 21st, the river being at the moment two feet above its level on the 15th, the aqueduct at Bourg was wrecked by a German shell, and for the time rendered useless. The enemy's observation must have been excellent, for he ceased firing directly after this shell had burst. A semi-permanent bridge was therefore begun at Bourg, which was supplemented by another at Soupir, of which the construction commenced on the 28th.

A wooden girder bridge to replace the broken span of the existing bridge was begun at Soissons on the 1st October and completed on the 9th. It was then handed over to the French, as the British were leaving the locality; it was known hereafter as the Pont des Anglais, and was in use continuously until destroyed in the German offensive in 1918. In addition to all these bridges, barges equipped with roadway were prepared, ready to be swung

instantly across the river to form additional bridges if required. Sept. 1914.

This bald enumeration, however, gives but a slight idea of the strain borne by the Engineers during the weeks that the Army was on the Aisne. Nearly all of the bridges were within known range of the German guns; most of them were constructed and all of them at different times repaired, under fire. At Vailly, where a permanent bridge was much needed, the German shells prevented even an attempt to build one. The rise of the water necessitated frequent changes and modifications of level; and the incessant rain made the task of keeping the approaches in order most difficult and trying. Yet the Engineers contrived not only to maintain the bridges, but to make bridgeheads and to entrench positions against the possibility of a retreat. In the course of the operations on the Aisne the divisional Field Companies R.E. which had done the work, were reinforced by the Bridging Train, and by the 20th and 42nd Fortress Companies from the Line of Communications; but even with this assistance the burden of work thrown upon them was enormous.

With these preliminary observations we may pass on to recount rapidly the operations on the British front, mentioning chiefly the events of the days on which infantry attacks took place, although on every day there was an intermittent duel of artillery. The chief centre of interest, be it remembered, was now shifting from the Aisne to the north-west, where, in the endeavour to out-flank each other, the French and Germans were continually extending their sphere of operations northwards in the so-called "Race to the Sea." Of these operations an outline will be given later in this chapter.

## Operations on the Aisne

### *The week of 16th-22nd September.*

The general characteristics of the week which saw the beginning of trench warfare were continued wet weather, intermittent bombardment by both sides, steady advance of the German trenches to closer quarters with the British, and almost daily German attacks of a more or less serious nature. These were made, as already explained, to hold the Allied forces on the Aisne whilst troops were being shifted to the western flank. The losses from the heavy

Sketch 7. Maps 31, 33 & 34.

German shells were at the outset considerable, for the British trenches were as yet so incomplete as to afford only indifferent shelter. Thus on the 15th September the Highland Light Infantry had sixty, and on the following day the 2/Grenadiers seventy casualties from German shell fire. On the 16th the Oxfordshire Light Infantry lost twenty-two killed and wounded and the 1/King's Royal Rifle Corps sixty-eight; whilst on the 17th the artillery had forty horses killed at Bucy le Long. On the right of the I. Corps front the trenches (held by the 2nd Infantry Brigade) just south of the Chemin des Dames were subjected to a galling enfilade fire both from rifles and guns. The plateau of Paissy again was swept by artillery fire from east, north and west. German snipers were both active and troublesome against the front of the 3rd and 5th Divisions, where their possession of commanding ground combined with the proximity of the trenches, gave them decided advantages. At Missy the British position seemed tactically hopeless, for it was immediately dominated by the promontory at Chivres, and had but a limited field of fire in any direction. Just east of Ste. Marguerite ($1\frac{1}{4}$ miles W.N.W. of Missy) the trenches of the British were in places only twelve yards from the enemy; and nowhere in the Chivres Valley were they more than two hundred yards distant. Altogether during the first few days of the new warfare the situation of the British seemed anything but good.

Nevertheless the leaders and troops never for a moment lost confidence; and every day saw the situation improve. On the 16th September the 6th Division, delayed in transport by the shifting of the British base from Havre to St. Nazaire, arrived in rear of the III. Corps. It was temporarily broken up in order to provide relief to the war-worn troops of the first five divisions. The 17th and 18th Infantry Brigades were attached to the I. Corps, and the 16th to the II. Corps. The 17th Infantry Brigade became corps reserve, releasing the 1st Cavalry Division which from the 19th September onward furnished five hundred rifles for the trenches about Chavonne. On the 17th a supply of entrenching tools reached the II. Corps, and its casualties from that date sensibly diminished. On the 19th arrived the first 18-pdrs. to make good part of the losses of the II. Corps at Le Cateau; and from that day forward a stream of drafts poured in to fill the gaps in the battalions.

It is significant of the heavy and unexpected wastage that within a month of the firing of the first shot, the supply of Regular reservists for many regiments had been exhausted, and that men of the Special Reserve—the Militia of old days—were beginning to take their place. Many stragglers however who had lost their regiments in the retreat, now returned to them fresh and re-equipped, including several of the Dublin Fusiliers who had got through the German front to Boulogne after the battle of Le Cateau.[1] Transport wagons, which had long been given up for lost, also reappeared from time to time; one such wagon, which had been missing since the 24th of August, rejoining the 3rd Cavalry Brigade on the 21st September. The reinforcements together with the improvement of the defences rendered two brigades sufficient to defend a sector for which three had hitherto been necessary; as a result, on the 19th September the 1st (Guards) and 2nd Infantry Brigades were withdrawn from the trenches for a few days' rest; and the line, which had hitherto absorbed the whole of the 1st Division, was defended by the 3rd and 18th Infantry Brigades alone. Altogether as the month of September wore on, the strain on the men was slowly but sensibly relaxed. Considering that the weather was abominable and the loss of great-coats and waterproof sheets during the retreat was not made good for some time, the health of the troops suffered marvellously little. There was, it is true, already trouble with their feet, many of the trenches being deep in mud during the rains, and in the flat ground about Chivres two feet deep in water. But constant digging kept the men in good condition; and, as soon as a regular system of reliefs became possible, a course of route-marching was introduced for the companies off duty to fit them for the work of an ordinary campaign. 16 Sept. 1914.

*16th September.*

The 16th September was regarded by the British as an uneventful day without change in the situation.[2] It dawned with heavy rain and mist, but as soon as the weather cleared about 8 A.M. artillery fire was opened by both sides and continued with quiet intervals until the evening. It appears, however, that the *XII.*, *XV.* and *VII. Reserve Corps*, forming the German *Seventh Army*, and the *III.*

[1] See p. 189.

[2] Appendix 50.

*Corps*, were ordered to renew the attack.[1] They attempted to do so, but " the *XII.* and *XV. Corps* made no actual " progress, the *III. Corps* declared it could not advance " until the *VII. Reserve* attacked and in both divisions " of the latter Corps (opposite General Haig) the day " passed in stationary fire fight." This result, it is stated, was due to " an overpowering artillery fire."

### *17th September.*

Sketch 7. Maps 31 & 33.

After a quiet night, at dawn on the 17th there were feeble attacks, all of them easily repulsed, upon the 2nd Infantry Brigade on the right of the British line. Between 11 A.M. and noon a more serious onslaught was made upon the extreme right of the British and the extreme left of the French, which was held by Moroccan battalions.[2] These troops, having lost practically all their officers, gave way for the moment, and the two reserve companies of the 2nd Infantry Brigade were moved up to fill the gap and came under artillery fire which cost them fifty casualties. For the next three hours the Germans kept up a heavy bombardment, after which about a company of German infantry stole forward, under cover of mist and rain, to a previously abandoned trench, whence they could enfilade the British line. The Northamptons and Queen's, supported by the 2/King's Royal Rifle Corps, were ordered to turn the enemy out; and the Northamptons, creeping up unperceived, with a single rush recaptured the trench.

Shortly afterwards a party of Germans, headed by two officers, advanced towards the 2/K.R.R.C. with their rifles slung and their hands up. An officer went out to meet them and the men stood up in their trenches, whereupon the Germans opened fire from the hip, wounding several. The trick was not forgotten by the 2/K.R.R.C. Almost immediately after this incident another body of three or four hundred Germans repeated the same stratagem against the Northamptons, actually driving them back a few yards in the first surprise. But the machine-gun officer of the 2/K.R.R.C. who had a gun trained on this second body, mowed them down almost, if not absolutely,

[1] Zwehl, pp. 84, 85.

[2] This attack was made by the *28th Infantry Brigade* (the " active " brigade of the *VII. Reserve Corps*), and a composite force from the *XII. Corps* :—*63rd Infantry Brigade*, 3 field batteries, and a heavy howitzer battery. Zwehl, p. 86.

to a man.[1] Both sides then made efforts to advance, first the British, who were checked by the German guns, and then in turn the Germans, who were stopped by the rifles and machine guns of the Queen's and the 2/K.R.R.C. Finally the enemy fell back, leaving behind him forty prisoners and a large number of dead. The loss of the 2nd Infantry Brigade in the affair was about two hundred of all ranks. 17 Sept. 1914.

On the British left the only noteworthy occurrence was a heavy bombardment of Bucy le Long which for a time drove the 10th Infantry Brigade from its trenches.

Both right and left of the British the French persisted steadily in their offensive. On the right Craonne and Corbeny (1½ miles north-east of Craonne) were constantly changing hands, though on the evening of the 17th they were finally left in possession of the enemy. The arrival of the German *XII. Corps*[2] in that quarter checked any further progress on the part of the French XVIII. Corps.

On the left, the chief effort of the French Sixth Army had been made on the extreme flank at Noyon ; but there had also been hard fighting north of Soissons, and by the evening of the 17th the 45th French Division had gained at least a footing on the plateau of Cuffies (1½ miles north of Soissons). But on that same evening the point of application of the outflanking movement was reported to have shifted from Noyon, westward and slightly northward, to Lagny and Lassigny. As two fresh German corps were known to be moving in that direction from Belgium, General Joffre was preparing to meet them by forming a new Army on the left, to be known as the Second Army, under General de Castelnau. It was to consist of the XIII. and IV. Corps of the Sixth Army, the XIV. (from the First Army) and the XX. (from the old Second Army), with the 1st, 5th, 8th and 10th Cavalry Divisions under General Conneau. Meanwhile the left of the reduced French Sixth Army was entrenching strongly about Nampcel. General Joffre hoped to resume the offensive directly the Second Army was ready to move forward. Map 3.

The German report for this day—and also for the 18th

[1] General von Zwehl, on behalf of the German *16th Reserve Infantry Regiment* (*VII. Reserve Corps*) makes on this very day similar charges against the British of pretending to surrender and then firing (p. 73). There was no doubt a misunderstanding, begun by the men of one side or the other making signs of surrender, not noticed, or resented, by their commanders or neighbouring units.

[2] See p. 364.

—as regards the British front is, that except for the action of the *28th Infantry Brigade*, already narrated, "the attacks ordered did not take place." [1]

*18th September.*

Sketch 7. Maps 31 & 33.

On this day the French Fifth Army on the British right was driven back a little by a German counter-attack which gave the enemy possession of Brimont (5 miles north of Rheims).

On the British front the Germans tried to reoccupy the trenches near the Chemin des Dames from which they had been expelled by the Northamptons on the 17th. They were, however, easily dealt with by the 1/Gloucestershire of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, who brought away four machine guns as trophies.

On the west, General Maunoury's extreme right gained a little ground near Perrière Farm north-east of Crouy, but achieved nothing of great importance. The need for a decisive movement on the western flank as a solution of the deadlock was becoming more and more evident.

*19th September.*

Sketch 7. Map 31.

This day brought some relief to the right of the British line, for, though the 3rd Infantry Brigade remained in position, the 1st (Guards) and 2nd Infantry Brigades, as has been mentioned, were replaced after dark by the 18th, which was strong enough to hold the ground occupied by both. After heavy shelling, there were one or two trifling attacks on the 2nd Division, and at dusk one rather more serious against the 3rd Division, all of which were beaten off with considerable loss to the enemy. The German report for this day is that "there was no progress worth "mentioning as the enemy was in possession of good "observation posts on the Chemin des Dames and could "direct his field and heavy artillery fire where he desired," [2] a situation not realised by the British.

Henceforward, as will be seen, such efforts as the enemy infantry made were directed against the right of the British line. On the left Vailly, Missy and Bucy le Long were heavily shelled almost daily, particularly Missy; and Ste. Marguerite was under continuous rifle and machine-gun fire, but no infantry attacks were made on

[1] Zwehl, p. 85.

[2] Zwehl, p. 86.

the II. and III. Corps sectors, except on that of the 3rd Division around Vailly. Opposite the 4th Division, the enemy showed great activity in putting up wire. There were, indeed, many signs of the reduction of the infantry in the front line, but none that his heavy guns were being removed, or that he was at all inclined to retire. 19-20 Sept. 1914.

The front, over eight miles, held by the 3rd, 5th and 4th Divisions, was too long in proportion to their reduced numbers, and the enemy's position too strong for any hope of progress to be made without an important diversion elsewhere. The 4th Division was able to assist the attacks of the French on its left with gun and rifle fire, but had orders not to take part in a general attack. Nevertheless, the divisions were ordered to keep the possibility of advance before them. At the same time, as a measure of precaution in case the II. and III. Corps should be driven back, entrenchments were taken in hand on the heights on the southern side of the Aisne. The 19th Infantry Brigade and some units of the 6th Division, with the assistance of inhabitants, were employed on their construction. Later the I. Corps undertook defences on the south bank of the Aisne, so that on the 30th September Sir John French was able to inform General Joffre that there was an alternative position there, entrenched from end to end and ready for occupation. Map 33.

*20th September.*

### Attacks on the 1st Division

On the 20th September, General von Heeringen, commanding the German *Seventh Army*, ordered a general attack by the whole of the *VII. Reserve Corps*.[1] The day was cold and at times there were heavy showers of hail.

Soon after dawn the Germans attacked the Moroccans immediately on the right of the British line and drove them back. The officer commanding the 1/West Yorkshire Regiment, which was the right battalion of the British Army, thereupon sent out a company to cover his exposed flank. The Moroccans soon rallied and came forward again, when, not knowing what had happened, they fired into this company, inflicting some thirty casualties. The line then settled down again under a heavy fire from German artillery and rifles. A second German Sketch 7. Maps 31 & 33.

[1] See p. 394.

attack made between 10 and 11 A.M. was effectively checked by the West Yorkshire. Between noon and 1 P.M. the enemy delivered a third attack under cover of a heavy storm of rain, and once again the Moroccans fell back. Once again Lieut.-Colonel Towsey, commanding the West Yorkshire, threw out a company eastward to protect his right, at the same time asking help from the 2nd Cavalry Brigade at Paissy. But before this could come, the enemy from the gap left by the Moroccans enfiladed and, after inflicting heavy casualties, charged and captured the remnants of the right company of the West Yorkshire. Within half an hour, working down the line, the Germans were in occupation of the front trenches of the battalion and had swept what remained of two more companies into captivity. The officer commanding led forward his one remaining company to retrieve the situation, but being met by heavy fire on his front and right flank, whereby he himself was wounded, fell back on the cavalry at Paissy.

The disaster to the West Yorkshire laid open the flank of the Durham Light Infantry who were next on their left, and exposed them to so destructive an enfilade fire, that the East Yorkshire, on the left of the D.L.I., were sent to relieve them by a counter-attack. No sooner, however, did they leave their trenches than they were beaten back to them by overwhelming shrapnel and machine-gun fire. Meanwhile B Squadron of the 18th Hussars sent up by the G.O.C. 2nd Cavalry Brigade, in consequence of a report of the attack despatched from the West Yorkshire at 7 A.M., rode to the head of the valley north of Paissy. Leaving their horses there, forty men climbed the slope to the plateau; learning the situation from the officer commanding the Sherwood Foresters, who were in brigade reserve at Troyon, and seeing a few infantry coming back, they went forward to what must have been the support trenches of the West Yorkshire. The news of the arrival of the cavalry ran like wildfire along the line and had the greatest possible moral effect; as a result, there being no real pressure of pursuit, the situation was saved.

A call for support had also been received by the 2nd Cavalry Brigade from the French, but on the officer commanding the 18th Hussars riding forward to learn how he could best assist, he was informed by a French general, that French reinforcements were arriving and British help was no longer required. A Squadron of the 9th Lancers was however sent to entrench in echelon in rear of the

West Yorkshire trenches in case the Africans should again give way. 20 Sept. 1914.

About 1 P.M. the second appeal for help from the West Yorkshire arrived at the headquarters of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade. General de Lisle at once set his whole brigade in motion. It was followed by the 2/Royal Sussex (2nd Infantry Brigade) who were still at Paissy. The 2/Sherwood Foresters (18th Brigade reserve) had previously gone forward under Brigadier-General Congreve.

The 4th Dragoon Guards rallied the remnant of the West Yorkshire, and, together with the 18th Hussars, occupied the supporting trenches in rear of the captured first line. These they held successfully against heavy pressure from the enemy until the arrival of the Sussex made the position secure. The lost trenches were finally regained by a dashing counter-attack of the Sherwood Foresters, but at a cost of two hundred casualties, mostly from machine-gun fire. It was 4.30 P.M. when the situation was thus restored. The day had cost the 2nd and 18th Infantry Brigades nearly 400 killed and wounded and 500 missing.

### Attacks on the 2nd Division

The onslaughts of the enemy were, however, by no means confined to the extreme right of the British line. At dawn an attack was made on the King's of the 6th Infantry Brigade and was pressed to within eighty yards of their trenches, immediately east of the Oise and Aisne Canal, before the Germans finally broke and retired, having suffered heavily. At about 9 A.M. they made a second onset, bringing up two machine guns to the right of the King's, near the crest of the western slope of Beaulne spur, and advancing both through the woods and across the open. Two platoons of the 2/Highland Light Infantry and six of the 2/Worcestershire were thereupon sent to counter-attack through the wood and to clear the ridge beyond it. With great difficulty they made their way through the thicket under heavy fire, and charged and carried a German trench beyond it; they were still advancing when they fell into an ambush. Being enfiladed by machine guns from their left and having lost every one of their officers, they were driven back in disorder on to a company of the King's. Some of these men they carried away with them in their retreat; but the rest stood firm. The situation was becoming serious, for the Connaught Rangers

Sketch 7. Maps 31 & 33.

on the ridge further east had been driven out of their trenches by a heavy bombardment, and the right flank of the King's was thus exposed. However, the flank company threw back its right, and the other, above mentioned, quickly rallied and re-formed. The deadly fire of these two companies was too much for the Germans, who retired, very severely punished. Seventy of their dead and many wounded were found next day by a patrol of the King's in a single abandoned trench; and as the casualties of the battalion did not exceed fifty, the honours of the day were decidedly with it.

With the 4th (Guards) Brigade of the 2nd Division, about Soupir, the enemy interfered little except by heavy shelling and occasional feint attacks.

### Attacks on the 3rd Division

Sketch 7. Maps 31 & 33.

Before dawn the Germans opened a violent bombardment on the 9th Infantry Brigade on the line south-west of Rouge Maison (1 mile north-east of Vailly); and later they brought forward first a machine gun and afterwards a field gun to enfilade the trenches of the Royal Fusiliers. They had already stolen forward during the night and entrenched themselves within four hundred yards of the Fifth Fusiliers, who were on the left of the Royal Fusiliers. It seemed evident that an attack was in prospect. At 9 A.M., however, two howitzers of the XXX. Brigade R.F.A. forced the Germans to withdraw their guns from the neighbourhood of Rouge Maison, and this removed the pressure on the right flank of the 9th Infantry Brigade. The Fifth then counter-attacked, driving the German snipers from the wood in their front; and at 1 P.M. the engagement died down. The casualties of the brigade were trifling; those of the enemy probably considerable.

The above movements, however, were but a diversion in favour of a more serious attack upon the 7th Infantry Brigade holding the eastern face of the salient of Vailly from Chavonne north-westwards, where an entirely unsuccessful attempt had been made on the previous day. Between 8 and 9 A.M. after a heavy bombardment the front held by the Wiltshire, in the centre of the brigade line, was engaged by the enemy's infantry; and a couple of hours later a party of some two hundred Germans with two machine guns contrived to push through some dense undergrowth between

the right flank of the battalion and the left flank of the 3/Worcestershire, who were immediately on its right. Having thus pierced the line, thanks to the facilities of approach afforded by the wooded valley, the Germans came suddenly on the reserve of the Wiltshire and carried off a few prisoners. They also fired on the 2/South Lancashire, who were coming forward from the rear to reinforce the Wiltshire; there was much confused fighting at close quarters whilst the enemy strove to make good his advantage and envelop the right of the British line. Meanwhile the Irish Rifles on the left of the Wiltshire were suffering severely from shelling; and shortly after noon the brigadier was obliged to ask assistance both from his divisional commander and from the 4th (Guards) Brigade on his right at Chavonne. 20 Sept. 1914.

Throughout this time the three companies of the Wiltshire steadily continued to hold the enemy at bay on their front. The call for assistance had first reached the Queen's Bays at Chavonne, and they, being unable to leave their position, passed it on to the nearest battery. After a time the 2/South Staffordshire of the 6th Infantry Brigade from 2nd Division reserve were sent mid-way between Chavonne and Vailly and began to work northward up the valley against the enemy's left flank. A gun of the XXIII. Brigade R.F.A. also came into action with great effect; and shortly before 2 P.M. the hostile advance was brought to a standstill. The Germans, falling back a little, then tried to entrench themselves upon two bare knolls but were driven off them by shrapnel; and about 4 P.M. about two hundred men of the Wiltshire, Worcestershire and South Lancashire advanced, and after sharp fighting drove the enemy back to his own lines, leaving the ground behind littered with his killed and wounded. These were found to belong to the *56th Infantry Regiment* of the *VII.* and *64th* of the *III. Corps*. The struggle in fact was sharp; it cost the 7th Infantry Brigade some four hundred casualties, nearly half of which fell upon the South Lancashire. The 16th Infantry Brigade and the 2nd Cavalry Division were during the afternoon placed by G.H.Q. at the disposal of the II. Corps to assist the 3rd Division, but it was not found necessary to employ them.

Altogether the 20th September was a successful day for the British, though, in addition to the loss above chronicled, it cost the B.E.F. nearly eighteen hundred killed, wounded and missing. The Germans had delivered

four serious attacks at four different points and had, after first gaining some little advantage, been everywhere repulsed. The French immediately to the right and left of the British were subjected to similar onslaughts with much the same result. The Fifth and Sixth Armies were both forced back a little at certain points; but the lost ground was recovered by the latter before nightfall and by the former within twenty-four hours. The Germans were evidently most anxious to hold the Allies to their ground and prevent them from shifting troops to their western flank; for already there were indications of a general movement of German units from east to west.

On the 20th the rain, which had been nearly continuous since the 12th and had made life in the trenches miserable, came to an end, and a period of fine autumn weather ensued.

The German report on the 20th is :[1]—

"The commander of the *VII. Reserve Corps* in accord-
"ance with the instructions of the *Seventh Army* ordered
"an attack of the whole corps in co-operation with the
"Gersdorff Detachment.[2] There was no success worth
"mention, and the situation remained apparently un-
"changed. Only on the right wing parts of the *13th*
"*Reserve Division* pushed on from Braye and the east
"end of the Bois de Grelines (1 mile east of Braye) and
"west of it the *III. Corps* made a little progress on the
"Ostel Plateau." These are the attacks on the 2nd and 3rd Divisions. "Ailles came into possession of the Gersdorff Brigade." It was part of the *XII. Corps*, therefore, which had attacked the West Yorkshire Regiment.

### *21st-24th September.*

Sketch 7. Maps 13 & 34.

On the night of the 20th/21st the posts of the South Wales Borderers and Welch Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Brigade were withdrawn from their advanced position at the head of the Chivy valley to a less exposed one on the spur south of the village, with the result that free access to the valley was now yielded to the enemy. But, if this ground was henceforward a source of some anxiety to the I. Corps, it became a trap for the Germans. They were under constant temptation to collect men there for

[1] Zwehl, p. 86.

[2] The composite force of the *XII. Corps* mentioned in footnote 2, p. 386.

attack; but each advance was the offering up of more troops as a sacrifice to the British batteries which were able to search every square-foot of the valley. 21-25 Sept. 1914.

The 21st and 22nd were days unmarked by any event of importance on the British front. The French Fifth and Sixth Armies kept the enemy on their fronts well occupied and both made a little progress, the left of the Fifth Army capturing the buildings at Hurtebise and Vauclerc on the Chemin des Dames immediately to the right of the British.

On the 23rd and 24th nothing of importance took place on the Aisne, although there were the usual desultory attacks, and the usual bombardment. Opportunity was taken to carry out reliefs. For instance the 17th Infantry Brigade took the place of the 5th, whose brigadier, General Haking, had been wounded, and allowed it to be withdrawn into corps reserve. The 2nd Infantry Brigade resumed its old place as the right of the 1st Division.

As regards the German side: the commander of the *Seventh Army* again ordered a general attack for the 21st, being promised support from the neighbouring corps. This, however, led to the commander of the *VII. Reserve Corps* making a personal protest that "the daily repeti-" tion of attack orders could not obtain any success. " For this the preliminary conditions were at least a fresh " division with strong artillery, if possible a whole corps." One brigade (Gersdorff's) could only put 200 rifles with nine or ten officers into the fight out of its six battalions. No success could be expected from partial attacks, "the " enemy was too stubborn and used his artillery too skil-" fully." "On the front of the other corps the situation was similar." [1]

### *25th-27th September.*

### The Last Attacks

Throughout the 25th September, the Germans showed activity in the Chivy valley—they were apparently collecting troops there—and early on the morning of the 26th, between 3.40 and 4 A.M., they made an attack against the right of the 2nd Infantry Brigade, the right of the British line, combined with a more serious effort against the left of the French XVIII. Corps, next to it. The attack was not well carried out, the enemy advanced in heavy columns Sketch 7. Maps 31 & 34.

[1] Zwehl, pp. 87, 88.

which gave a splendid target to the British machine guns, and it was easily repulsed.

At the same moment as this attack was beaten back, another began to develop against the front of the 3rd Infantry Brigade on the left of the 2nd, which continued nearly until noon. First, in the early light of the morning, about a thousand men in close formation advanced against —it can hardly be called attacked—the Queen's at the head of the Moulins valley. This again gave a superb opportunity to the British machine guns, and the column was repulsed with heavy loss. Nothing was attempted against the Gloucestershire on the left of the Queen's; but against the South Wales Borderers, next to them on the spur of Mont Faucon, a force of about 1200 Germans issued from the woods and broken ground on their front, and moved forward apparently in platoon columns covered by skirmishers. A fire fight ensued, which lasted nearly two hours before superiority over the Germans was obtained. Towards 8 A.M. a further effort was made by the Germans with increased numbers, and at one point they succeeded in penetrating the line of the Borderers. The reserve company went forward without a moment's hesitation, and, with the assistance of two companies of the Welch which were sent by the brigadier to the right round the slopes of Mont Faucon, succeeded in retaking the trenches after a hot fight. Meanwhile, the rest of the South Wales Borderers were for a time held to their trenches by heavy shrapnel fire. The East Yorkshire and Durham Light Infantry of the 18th Infantry Brigade were warned by the divisional staff to reinforce them, but their services were not required. The 2nd Infantry Brigade had succeeded in clearing the woods on its immediate front, although the Germans did not finally withdraw until about 11.30 A.M., still covered by a heavy fire from their batteries on the heights above, which made communication with the British forward trenches impossible. The retirement of the enemy infantry up the Chivy valley, however, found the British artillery ready for it: thirty-three guns and howitzers of the 1st and 2nd Division concentrated their fire on the valley, and the Cameron Highlanders of the 1st (Guards) Brigade on the left of the 3rd were able to enfilade the retreating parties, who were in close formation. They were seen to suffer heavily. The total losses must have been severe: dead were lying thick before the trench the Germans had carried, and, looking to the havoc wrought

by the British artillery, the number of enemy killed alone must have exceeded the total casualties of the British. These were just under two hundred and fifty, four-fifths of which fell upon the South Wales Borderers. Bad luck befell the Cameron Highlanders, for a cave in which their headquarters were installed was wrecked by a high-explosive shell, which killed and buried the acting commanding officer, Captain D. N. C. C. Miers, four other officers and twenty-three other ranks. 25 Sept. 1914.

It was found on investigation that some of the German dead and of the prisoners taken this day belonged to the *21st* and *25th Divisions*, both of the *XVIII. Corps*, parts of which, and of the *XV. Corps*, it is now known, were brought up as fresh troops to drive back the British.[1] But, except for a momentary penetration at one place in the line, they achieved nothing; as ever, the shooting of the battalions and batteries of the B.E.F. was too effective even for the German Army of 1914.

The German account of the offensive[2] on the 26th September is that it was made for strategic purposes to prevent the Allies shifting troops westward. It was carried out by the whole of the *Seventh Army*. The *III. Corps* of the *First Army* should have taken part, but reported that "it could not attack, but would support "the offensive with its heavy artillery."

The attack on the right of the British line was made by the reinforced *28th Infantry Brigade*, the *63rd Infantry Brigade*, and battalions of the *132nd* and *171st Regiments* of the *XV. Corps*. The troops "became engaged in a "stationary fire fight without actual progress."

The attack near the Chivy valley was carried out by the *13th Reserve Division* and *50th Infantry Brigade*. "Chivy fell into the hands of the Westphalians, and some "ground beyond it was won"; but later "Chivy had to "be evacuated, and in general the troops had to go back "to their starting places."

Mention is also made of an attack by the *14th Reserve Division* (less *28th Brigade*), between the two above mentioned, towards Troyon. The left (east) portion of the division "struck a wire entanglement of the enemy, "certainly a poor one, but it was not expected and could

[1] The *50th Infantry Brigade* of the *25th Division* and four battalions of the *XV. Corps* were brought up to reinforce the *VII. Reserve Corps*. Zwehl, pp. 88, 89.

[2] Zwehl, pp. 88-90.

" not be surmounted. The whole front of the division " came to a standstill under heavy hostile artillery fire."

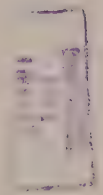
The account ends with the words :—" This attempt at " attack had also been shattered."

On the 27th the Germans confined themselves to artillery fire until dusk, when somewhat feeble attacks upon the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Brigades were renewed and easily repulsed. Lower down the river the valley of the Aisne was alive with bursting shells ; two to three hundred fell upon Missy alone, but they did little military damage.

On this day, hand-grenades, whose revival dates from the siege of Port Arthur, were for the first time during the war thrown into the British trenches ; and, since the Expeditionary Force in France had none, the Royal Engineers were called upon to improvise, with gun-cotton, a missile with which to reply to this latest device of the Germans, until a supply of service grenades should arrive from home.

*28th September-14th October.*

Sketch 7. Map 31. From this day forth offensive operations on the British front ceased, and the 1st October found the positions practically the same as on the 14th Sept. Artillery activity continued on both sides ; and the Germans occasionally managed by lucky shots to burst shells in the billets of British units well south of the river ; the 9th Lancers lost over forty officers and men in this way at Longueval ($2\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Bourg) on the 29th. No further serious attacks by infantry took place and there were signs of cessation of artillery action also. The expenditure of gun ammunition had been so enormous, and had so far exceeded the calculations of the most far-seeing, that the British Commander-in-Chief had been for some days anxious as to the supply of shells for his heavy artillery, but on the 28th it was noticed that twelve German shells which fell among the 9th Infantry Brigade failed to burst ; and by the 6th October the proportion of " blinds " fired by the German batteries had risen to one in two. Evidently the enemy on this part of the line was also in difficulties for ammunition and using old stock. But the time was now coming for the British to leave the Aisne.



PUBLIC

# THE EXTENSION OF THE BATTLE-LINE NORTHWARDS.

## 15 SEPTEMBER-8 OCTOBER, 1914.

*Note. The German Cavalry was always on the northern flank of their battle-line. Only the last position is shown.*

Ordnance Survey.

## The Extension of the Opposing Armies Northward. The "Race to the Sea."

For the proper appreciation of the new situation in Flanders in which the British Expeditionary Force was shortly to take its place, and in order to understand how it happened that there were enemy forces there ready to confront it, it is necessary to relate shortly the movements of the opposing forces of the French and German Armies on the western flank, though the story, as it refers to the independent operations of our Allies, falls somewhat outside the boundaries hitherto observed in the narrative. 17 Sept. 1914. Sketch 8. Maps 2, 3 & 4.

It will be remembered that, shortly after the Aisne was reached, General Joffre had reinforced the Sixth Army with the XIII. Corps, and impressed on General Maunoury the importance of enveloping the German right flank; in consequence of which, on the 17th September, the latter commander again took the offensive, as already mentioned.[1] His left wing, consisting of the XIII. Corps, IV. Corps and 6th Group of Reserve divisions (61st and 62nd), was ordered to outflank the German right which was bent back near Noyon, south of the Oise; whilst his right was to consolidate the ground gained north of the Aisne, keep contact with the enemy, and be ready to resume the offensive.

At the moment the forces at the disposal of the German Supreme Command to meet the enveloping movement were small in number. The *IX. Reserve Corps*, which had been brought from Antwerp, had arrived on the right of the *First Army* on the 15th and had been thrust into the fight by von Kluck next day. The *Sixth Army* had been ordered on the 13th to leave Lorraine (where it was replaced by *Landwehr* and *Ersatz* troops) for the western flank, but it could not be expected to arrive there in less than ten days. Von Bülow, with the approval of O.H.L., ordered von Kluck to stop an offensive[2] that, in order to prevent envelopment, he was wildly taking south-westward with his right—the *IV.* and *IX. Reserve Corps* and the *4th* and *7th Cavalry Divisions*—and instructed him to echelon these two corps behind his right flank. On the 16th, the *2nd* and *9th Cavalry Divisions* were sent from the Chemin des Dames to his support.

On the 17th September, before the retrograde move-

[1] See p. 387. [2] See p. 371.

ment of von Kluck's right could be carried out, the French offensive began. The French IV. and XIII. Corps advancing up both sides of the Oise came into collision with the German right in the area Carlepont—Noyon. On the 18th however the French attack came to a standstill on a line south-east and north-west through Carlepont. The first attempt to outflank the Germans had failed and had only resulted in the extension of the battle front north of the Aisne.

General Joffre made his next effort with the reconstructed Second Army under General de Castelnau, and on the 26th September he sent General Foch, as his deputy, to take charge of the operations on the western flank. The composition of the Second Army has already been given.[1] As a preliminary measure, its four corps were concentrated about Amiens, the four cavalry divisions covering its left flank. On the 22nd September, the Second Army advanced across the Avre against the front Lassigny—Roye—Chaulnes. But, by this time, new German forces had arrived and were ready to parry the envelopment. The German *II. Corps* of the *First Army* had been withdrawn from its position on the Aisne—entrenchments now allowed the line to be held with fewer men—and brought to the right of the *IX. Reserve Corps*. It came into line between Noyon and Roye on the 18th/19th September. Even with the support of von der Marwitz's four cavalry divisions, the *II. Corps* proved insufficient to stop de Castelnau's offensive, and on the afternoon of the 23rd the French Second Army had reached the road Ribecourt—Lassigny—Roye and was threatening the German communications at Ham and St. Quentin. But at the critical moment, the German *XVIII. Corps*, sent off by road on the 21st from the neighbourhood of Rheims, over fifty miles away, was approaching Ham. It immediately counter-attacked westward towards Roye. Supported by the *II. Corps* it forced back the right wing of the French. De Castelnau's left wing, however, reached Péronne and formed a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Somme.

The offensive force of the French Second Army was for the moment spent; and it was not fated to make further progress, for another German Army was beginning to appear on the western flank.

At a conference between von Falkenhayn and von Bülow on the 21st, it had been decided to concentrate the

[1] See p. 387.

*Sixth Army* (which, as has been already mentioned, had orders on the 13th to move west from Lorraine) in as great strength as possible, near Amiens; it was to make a push for the coast and then turn and envelop the French left wing south of the Somme. Before however these troops could arrive de Castelnau's offensive had so materially altered the situation that this plan had to be abandoned; for the first two corps (the *XXI.* and *I. Bavarian*) as they came up found their way to Amiens barred and they were merely used to extend the front. 24-27 Sept. 1914.

The *XXI.* Corps had entrained at Blouay (Lunéville) on the 15th September, and had been railed through Belgium to Cambrai, whence it marched at once towards Chaulnes, arriving, on the right of the *XVIII. Corps*, on the 24th. The same evening the *I. Bavarian Corps* came up on the right of the *XXI.*, facing Péronne. Entrained at Glonville (east of Epinal) on the 14/15th September, it had been railed to Namur, whence it made a forced march. These two newly arrived corps, with von der Marwitz's cavalry (now reinforced by the *Guard Cavalry Division*) on the right, drove the French out of Péronne and across the Somme. On the 26th after heavy fighting de Castelnau took up a strong position on the line Lassigny—Roye—Bray. The German cavalry corps moved further north to clear the front for the *II. Bavarian Corps* which now came into line on the right of the *I. Bavarian Corps*, north of the Somme. This corps had entrained at Metz on the 18th/19th September and had travelled as far as Valenciennes by rail.

On the 27th von der Marwitz's *Cavalry Corps* continued its way northwards, driving away d'Amade's French Territorials, now under General Brugère, and again clearing the front for the *XIV. Reserve Corps*, which came up on that day on the right of the *II. Bavarian Corps* and at once moved on Albert. The two divisions of the *XIV. Reserve Corps* had detrained at Valenciennes and Cambrai.[1]

On the 25th September the German Supreme Command had moved from Luxembourg to Mezières—Charleville, and had ordered the *Second*, *Seventh* and *First Armies* to take the offensive again, in order to hold the Allies to their position on the Aisne, and prevent the flow of reinforcements to the Somme district. It was in consequence of

[1] An interesting account of the journey from Lorraine and the disorganization at Cambrai is given in the "Erlebnisse" of General von Stein who commanded the *XIV. Reserve Corps.*

this, as recorded earlier in the chapter, that the British were very seriously attacked on the 26th and 27th, and the German *Guard Corps* made a furious onslaught on the French near Rheims.

Meanwhile, the German offensive in the north was progressing. The *II. Bavarian* and *XIV. Reserve Corps* easily drove back the French Territorial division holding the Bapaume district, and were approaching Bray sur Somme and Albert in high hopes of reaching Amiens and Abbeville and the sea. But again reinforcements came to the French western flank, where General de Castelnau was holding on to cover the detrainment of the Tenth Army (at first called " Subdivision d'Armée ") near Arras. There was little time to lose, and during the 25th, 26th and 27th September the XXI. and X. Corps, which were north of the Somme, covered on the left by Brugère's group of Territorial divisions and Conneau's Cavalry Corps, were in grave danger; but by the evening of the 28th they had succeeded in stopping the Germans on the line Maricourt—Fricourt—Thiepval. Von der Marwitz's cavalry extended the German line further northwards to the neighbourhood of Arras, where it was held in check by Conneau's cavalry.

The commander of the new Tenth Army, General Maud'huy, had to deal with a totally different situation from that which had confronted de Castelnau on his arrival in the north. So far from being able to take the offensive in the hopes of turning the enemy's flank, a strong German force was already advancing and threatening Arras before the Tenth Army was even concentrated. The most General Maud'huy could hope for the moment was to bring it to a standstill. On the 29th September, the X. Corps then at Acheux, between Albert and Doullens (20 miles north of Amiens), Conneau's Cavalry Corps (1st, 3rd, 5th and 10th Cavalry Divisions) south-east of Arras, and d'Urbal's provisional corps, consisting of Barbot's and Fayolle's Reserve divisions, at Arras and Lens, respectively, were placed at his disposal.

On the 1st October, Maud'huy, having but a few hours' breathing space to make preparations, was intending to begin an offensive from Arras—Lens south-east against the German flank, in the expectation of finding nothing in front of him except cavalry.[1] But again the enemy was

[1] A most interesting account of General Maud'huy's operations will be found in the " Revue des Deux Mondes " for 1st August 1920.

able to parry the blow, for behind the cavalry three more corps had arrived, and were already deploying preparatory to taking the offensive. The French Tenth Army, scattered over a wide front, was soon in imminent danger of being itself enveloped. 1 Oct. 1914.

It was to be expected that the Germans would make every effort to prevent the French line from being extended to include Lille, and also—what would have been still more serious for them—from joining hands with the Belgian Army in Antwerp. This fortress, close to the Dutch frontier, offered, apart from its intrinsic importance, an ideal anchorage on which to secure the Allied extreme left flank. The German Supreme Command had already decided on its future plan. It involved three distinct operations, in which all the troops that could be released or collected were to be employed.[1]

First, a strong offensive was to be made on the northern wing near Arras. The three corps selected for the purpose were the *IV.* from the *First Army*, the *Guard Corps* from the *Second Army*, and the *I. Bavarian Reserve Corps*, the last remaining corps of the original *Sixth Army*.

Secondly, eight cavalry divisions (the *Bavarian Cavalry Division* had arrived and joined the others), under von der Marwitz, were to cover the right flank of the offensive and sweep across Flanders towards the coast.[2]

Thirdly, the operations at Antwerp were to be accelerated, and the place captured before it could be reinforced. The bombardment with 42-cm. howitzers was commenced on the night of the 27th/28th September.

It may be noticed here that, taking up a proposal made earlier from London, General Joffre, on the 16th September, had asked that all available troops should be sent to Dunkirk and Calais "to act effectively and constantly "against the enemy's communications," so as to interfere with his outflanking movements. In response, the Marine Brigade of the Royal Naval Division and the Oxfordshire Yeomanry were disembarked at Dunkirk on the night of the 19th/20th September.[3] They were under the command of Brigadier-General Aston, who had instructions to give Map 2.

[1] Falkenhayn, p. 12. Stegemann, ii. p. 70-76. Vogel, p. 179.

[2] *I. Cavalry Corps: Guard* and *4th Cavalry Divisions.*
*II.* „ „ *2nd, 7th* and *9th Cavalry Divisions.*
*IV.* „ „ *3rd, 6th* and *Bavarian Cavalry Divisions.*
("Schlachten und Gefechte," pp. 46 and 48).

[3] How they were got across is described in "Naval Operations," vol. i. p. 190.

the impression that they were the advanced guard of a large British force. As in the case of minor landings in the past, the enemy paid no direct attention to so stingless a threat, except to take measures to push on with the siege of Antwerp.

The action of General Aston's force, and of other troops landed on the coast in October 1914, will be related in due course in a subsequent volume. It suffices to say now that on the 28th September, the first day of the bombardment of Antwerp, General Aston, sending one battalion to Lille, moved the rest of his brigade to Cassel and watched the country by means of parties in motors. On the 29th, in consequence of sickness, he handed the command over to Brigadier-General Paris. On the 2nd October the brigade was moved to Antwerp, being followed on the 6th by two new brigades of the Royal Naval Division which had landed at Dunkirk on the night of the 4th/5th. On the 6th also the 7th Division landed at Zeebrugge, followed on the 7th by the 3rd Cavalry Division.[1]

Sketch 8. Maps 2 & 3.

To return to the German offensive against the French Tenth Army near Arras, the *Guard* and *IV. Corps* left their old positions on the Aisne on the 27th, and the *I. Bavarian Reserve Corps* entrained at Metz on the same day. The three corps came into action on the 1st October almost simultaneously in the above order from south to north, on the front Arras—Douai, where there were General Brugère's (formerly d'Amade's) Territorial troops, and thus encountered the Tenth Army whilst still preparing for its offensive. Neither side was destined to achieve its ambitious aims. Very heavy fighting took place on 1st–6th October, the French giving ground gradually, but eventually bringing the German onslaught to a standstill. By the evening of the 6th the front had become stabilized near the line Thiepval—Gommecourt—Blaireville—eastern outskirts of Arras—Bailleul—Vimy—Souchez, on which the belligerents were to face each other for so many months.[2]

The German hopes now rested on the three *Cavalry Corps*, *I.*, *II.* and *IV.* under von der Marwitz, outflanking the French line, and so compelling a withdrawal. They had been working north of the main battle, pushing local

[1] The organization of these divisions will be related in Volume II.

[2] It was on the morning of the 6th that General Foch said to the commander of the Tenth Army, "Fight to the last man, but hang on "like lice. No retirement. Every man to the attack" ("Revue des Deux Mondes," 15.8.1920, p. 846).

Territorial troops before them, to the line Lens—Lille (which town still remained in French possession). 5-9 Oct. 1914.

On the 5th October von der Marwitz had issued orders for a general offensive, the objectives of which were "finally "to break down the weakening resistance of the enemy "by operating against his flank and rear, to block all "the railways leading from Paris and the Lower Seine, "and to destroy completely the railways from the lower "Somme and the coastal railways near Abbeville." A number of additional artillery, engineer and infantry units were allotted to the cavalry divisions.[1]

The progress of this great cavalry raid must have been extremely disappointing to those who had conceived it. The operation was in fact a complete failure. The *I.* and *II. Cavalry Corps* advancing between Lens and Lille met with some opposition and by evening retired behind the Lorette heights. It was only with difficulty that they held their ground on the 7th, for the heads of the divisions of the French XXI. Corps, detrained near Béthune, were moving against them.

On the morning of the 8th, however, hopes of French success were again blighted by the arrival of the German *XIV. Corps* to extricate the cavalry. Entraining at Metz on the 4th October, this corps had marched to the field from Mons. On its arrival the *I.* and *II. Cavalry Corps* were sent north to penetrate between La Bassée and Armentières and reach Abbeville.

Meantime the *IV. Cavalry Corps* moving north of Lille had, on the 8th, passed through Ypres expecting to reach the sea that evening.[2] The columns turned south-west and were soon streaming on all the roads towards Hazebrouck. They turned back, however, on meeting resistance from units of de Mitry's newly formed cavalry corps,[3] and reassembled next day in and near Bailleul.

Thus by the 9th October the battle line had been extended from the Aisne westwards and northwards to within 30 miles of Dunkirk and the coast.

[1] Confirmation of this will be found in Reinhardt's "Sechs Monate Westfront," p. 19; Rutz's "Bayernkämpfe," p. 12; Hocker's "An der Spitze meiner Kompagnie," p. 124.

[2] Rutz's "Bayernkämpfe," pp. 16-25; he was with the *2nd Cavalry Division.*

[3] 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions, from the Fifth Army and Cavalry Corps, respectively.

## Transfer of the British from the Aisne to the left of the Line

Map 2. Towards the close of September Sir John French had suggested to General Joffre the transfer of the British Army to its former place on the left of the line. Other British troops, as has been already mentioned, were about to be landed in the north of France;[1] and it was obviously desirable that all the forces of the nation should act in one body. The lines of communication also of the B.E.F. would be greatly shortened by its being near the coast. The British were specially concerned in preventing the fall of Antwerp, and were interested, above all nations, in barring the way to the Channel ports from which the Germans could threaten the transport of troops from England to France and block the vital avenues of water-borne traffic converging on London. That the Germans had not seized Ostend, Calais and Boulogne during their first triumphant advance, when they might easily have done so, had been due to lack of troops;[2] and that omission they were now making every effort to make good.

But apart from all question of those ports, it was obvious that if the British were restored to their old place on the left of the new line, they could be reinforced with a swiftness and secrecy impossible elsewhere.

Against this movement there were the obvious objections that it must be carried out gradually, so that for a time the British Expeditionary Force would be divided; and that the British in their journey northward must move right across the line of the French communications and would necessarily prevent the despatch of French troops to the north for several, it was even said ten, days. General Joffre however agreed to Sir John French's proposal; and on the night of the 1st/2nd October was begun the withdrawal of the British troops from the valley of the Aisne. Their movements were carefully concealed; all marches were made by night and the men confined to their billets by day, so that no sign of their departure from the Aisne should be visible to enemy aircraft. These precautions were so far successful that on the 3rd October an intercepted German wireless message mentioned that all six British divisions were still on the Aisne.[3]

[1] See p. 404. [2] See p. 46.

[3] G.H.Q. operation orders for the relief and movements are given in Appendices 51 to 54.

The II. Corps was the first to move, the I. Corps extending its left to Vailly and the III. Corps its right to Missy to cover the vacated ground. A day's rest on the south bank enabled the II. Corps to make good its deficiencies in blankets and greatcoats which had been keenly felt throughout the miserable weather on the Aisne. By the night of the 3rd/4th the entire corps had started on its march westward to the railway at Compiègne and three neighbouring stations. The 2nd Cavalry Division marched by road on the night of the 2nd; the 1st Cavalry Division on the night of the 3rd. The III. Corps, giving over its trenches to the French on the night of the 6th, moved off twenty-four hours later, also to entrain at and near Compiègne, leaving the 16th Infantry Brigade with the I. Corps.[1] This last remained in its trenches until the night of the 12th/13th, but the evacuation was not finally completed until forty-eight hours later. 3-19 Oct. 1914.

The advance of the B.E.F. into Flanders will be dealt with in the succeeding volume of this history, but the following outline of it is given to complete the narrative of the move from the Aisne. During the 8th and 9th October the II. Corps detrained at Abbeville and concentrated on both banks of the lower Authie, about twelve miles north-east of Abbeville, in the area Genne Iverny—Gueschart—La Boisle—Raye. It then received orders to advance towards Béthune. On the 9th also, the 2nd Cavalry Division arrived between St. Pol and Hesdin, with the 1st a day's march in rear of it. On the 8th G.H.Q. moved from Fère en Tardenois to Abbeville and five days later to St. Omer.

On the 11th October, the III. Corps began detraining and concentrating at St. Omer and Hazebrouck, and subsequently moved on the left rear of the II. towards Bailleul and Armentières.

On the 19th, a week later than the III. Corps, the I. Corps detrained and concentrated at Hazebrouck, and moved on Ypres.

### Retrospect of the Battle of the Aisne

Thus ended for the British the fighting on the Aisne in 1914; and the narrative may be closed with a very brief review of the battle. Sketch 7. Map 31.

[1] The 19th Infantry Brigade took its place for a time in the III. Corps when it arrived in Flanders.

The actual passage of the Aisne is likely to be remembered in the annals of the Army as a very remarkable feat, consisting, as it did, of forcing a passage frontally without possibility of manœuvre. The Germans excuse their failure to stop the British at the river line by the explanation that their peace-time teaching required one single strong line and a long field of fire, and that they went back to the top of the plateau to secure these. The advance of the 11th Infantry Brigade alone across the damaged bridge at Venizel was a most audacious move; but at no point did the crossing of any one body of troops facilitate the passage of others, owing to the topography of the valley and the small depth of the positions gained on the north side of the river. But for the German failure to destroy completely the aqueduct at Bourg, it is possible that the British might have been unable to maintain their firm hold on the north bank. By the way of that aqueduct however the guns of the 1st Division managed to cross the river and find effective positions at once. Thus Sir Douglas Haig, taking instant advantage of his opportunity, was able to make his bold thrust forward on the 14th and to establish his right on the Chemin des Dames, where his troops clung to the shallow holes which did duty for trenches, with a tenacity beyond all praise. For want of another division in reserve, he was unable to push his advance further; and to the west of Troyon the 2nd Division, II. Corps and III. Corps were pinned to their ground and could give him no help.

Regarding the Aisne in the light of the ditch of a fortress, only the I. Corps had really passed over it and could see any prospect of carrying forward its attack. The II. and III. Corps had practically made no more than a lodgment on the escarp,[1] above which they dared not show their heads. They could find no effective positions for their artillery; and for a time could make little reply to the German bombardment except with rifle fire. Indeed, had not the enemy frequently assaulted the British lines in force and in close formation, the British would have had little to show in return for the casualties which they suffered from the German artillery. But, as matters fell out, the Germans gave on many occasions the very opportunity that the British soldier could take advantage of, and he did so to the full.

It is somewhat difficult to arrive at the total number

[1] The defender's side of the ditch of a fortress.

of German formations which fought the British five, and eventually six, divisions on the Aisne, for single brigades from many corps were put into the line. Thus we know [1] that, apart from the cavalry and two heavy howitzer batteries, the British I. Corps was opposed not only by the *VII. Reserve Corps*, but by a mixed detachment of the *XII. Corps* consisting of the *63rd Infantry Brigade*, three batteries and a heavy howitzer battery; the *50th Infantry Brigade* of the *XVIII. Corps*; five battalions of the *XV. Corps*, the *25th Landwehr Brigade*, and 1,200 men of the *X. Corps*: a total of over 20 extra battalions. The British II. Corps had opposite it the German *III. Corps* with the *34th Infantry Brigade* of the *IX. Corps* interposed between its divisions,[2] and two heavy howitzer batteries, as well as, on at least one day, a regiment of the *VII. Corps*. The four infantry brigades of the III. Corps had in front of them the German *II. Corps*, whose front was from Chivres sector (exclusive) to Cuffies.[3] Thus, recalling that German brigades contained six battalions to the British four, there were at least 100 German battalions to 78 British (including the 6th Division).

It is remarkable to note the contrast from the 16th September onward between the activity of the Germans in the new *Seventh Army* east of Celles and the apathy of the wearied soldiers of von Kluck's *First Army* west of the spur of Condé. Hardly a day passed without an onslaught of some kind on some point of the line between Paissy and Vailly; but, excepting on the 2nd October, there was little sign of an offensive movement west of Condé. There was, of course, constant shelling of the 5th and 4th Divisions, but little more; and yet the position of the 5th Division was so precarious as positively to invite attack. Moreover, the Germans can hardly have been unaware that the battalions of the 5th Division had suffered more, perhaps, in the previous operations than any others in the Army. The 4th Division, as its trenches improved and as its ranks were refilled, showed much enterprise on the Aisne. It could do nothing on a great scale; but by pushing trenches forward and by worrying the Germans perpetually with patrols and snipers, it established over them a well-marked ascendancy.

The British Army gained much useful experience on the Aisne, and absolute confidence in its shooting. The

[1] From von Zwehl, commander of the *VII. Reserve Corps*.
[2] Zwehl's map No. 4.
[3] Kluck, p. 187.

men learned how to entrench quickly and to appreciate the value of digging. The drafts were able to settle down, and the young soldiers of the Special Reserve had time to gather instruction from the trained officers and N.C.O.'s who, though sadly reduced in numbers, were still fairly abundant. For the rest, the soldiers astonished even those who had trained them by their staunchness, their patience, their indomitable cheerfulness under incessant hardship, and, in spite of a fire which no human being had ever before experienced, by their calm, cool courage at all times. Whether it was the gunner unloading ammunition almost too hot to handle, in the midst of blazing wagons; the engineer repairing his bridge under continuous fire; the infantryman patiently enduring heavy shell fire, patrolling No-man's-land in the hours of darkness, or, as sniper, lying all night on soaking clay in dripping beet-fields; the transport driver guiding his wagons through bursting shells; or the stretcher-bearer toiling through the dark hours to rescue the wounded; all alike proved themselves worthy soldiers of the King. Though their dearest friends, comrades of many years, fell beside them, they fought with the majesty of their ancestors, without anger or malice, trusting always in the good cause of their country. Their good health in quagmires of trenches under constant rain of itself testified to their discipline. Sober, temperate and self-respecting, they were not to be discouraged by wounds or sickness. There could be no fear as to the final victory, if only armies of such soldiers could be brought into being in sufficient numbers without delay, and conveyed in security across the Channel to France.

# APPENDICES

# ORDER OF BATTLE

OF THE

# BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

## AUGUST 1914[1]

### GENERAL HEADQUARTERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Commander-in-Chief . . | Field-Marshal Sir J. D. P. French, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.M.G. |
| GENERAL STAFF BRANCH: | |
| Chief of the General Staff . | Lieut.-General Sir A. J. Murray, K.C.B., C.V.O., D.S.O. |
| Major-General, General Staff | Major-General H. H. Wilson, C.B., D.S.O. |
| G.S.O. 1 (Operations) . . | Colonel G. M. Harper, D.S.O. |
| G.S.O. 1 (Intelligence) . . | Colonel G. M. W. Macdonogh. |
| ADJUTANT-GENERAL'S BRANCH: | |
| Adjutant-General . . . | Major-General Sir C. F. N. Macready, K.C.B. |
| Deputy Adjutant-General . | Major-General E. R. C. Graham, C.B. |
| Assistant Adjutant-General . | Colonel A. E. J. Cavendish, C.M.G. |
| QUARTERMASTER-GENERAL'S BRANCH: | |
| Quartermaster-General . . | Major-General Sir W. R. Robertson, K.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O. |
| Assistant Quartermaster-General | Colonel C. T. Dawkins, C.M.G. |
| *Attached:* | |
| Major-General, Royal Artillery | Major-General W. F. L. Lindsay, C.B., D.S.O. |
| Brigadier-General, Royal Engineers | Brigadier-General G. H. Fowke. |

[1] The Composition of Staffs is taken from "Expeditionary Force, General Headquarters, etc.," dated 8th August 1914; the units from the August and September copies of the "Composition of the British Expeditionary Force." The September issue is wrongly dated "1 August."

HEADQUARTERS OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES AND DEPARTMENTS :

| | |
|---|---|
| Director of Army Signals | Colonel J. S. Fowler, D.S.O. |
| Director of Supplies | Brigadier-General C. W. King, M.V.O. |
| Director of Ordnance Services | Brigadier-General H. W. Perry. |
| Director of Transport | Brigadier-General F. C. A. Gilpin, C.B. |
| Director of Railway Transport | Colonel J. H. Twiss. |
| Director of Works | Brigadier-General A. M. Stuart. |
| Director of Remounts | Brigadier-General F. S. Garratt, C.B., D.S.O. |
| Director of Veterinary Services | Brigadier-General J. Moore. |
| Director of Medical Services | Surgeon-General T. P. Woodhouse. |
| Director of Army Postal Services | Colonel W. Price, C.M.G. |
| Paymaster-in-Chief | Brigadier-General C. A. Bray, C.B., C.M.G. |

*The Cavalry Division*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Major-General E. H. H. Allenby, C.B. |
| G.S.O. 1 | Colonel J. Vaughan, D.S.O. |
| Commanding R.H.A. | Brigadier-General B. F. Drake. |

*1st Cavalry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General C. J. Briggs, C.B.

2nd Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays) ;
5th (Princess Charlotte of Wales's) Dragoon Guards ;
11th (Prince Albert's Own) Hussars.
1st Signal Troop.

*2nd Cavalry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General H. de B. de Lisle, C.B., D.S.O.

4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards ;
9th (Queen's Royal) Lancers ;
18th (Queen Mary's Own) Hussars.
2nd Signal Troop.

*3rd Cavalry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General H. de la P. Gough, C.B.

4th (Queen's Own) Hussars ;
5th (Royal Irish) Lancers ;
16th (The Queen's) Lancers.
3rd Signal Troop.

*4th Cavalry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General Hon. C. E. Bingham, C.V.O., C.B.

Composite Regiment of Household Cavalry;
6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers);
3rd (King's Own) Hussars.
4th Signal Troop.

*Cavalry Divisional Troops*

*Artillery* . . III. Brigade R.H.A.,
D and E Batteries;
III. Brigade Ammunition Column.

VII. Brigade R.H.A.,
I and L[1] Batteries;
VII. Brigade Ammunition Column.

*Engineers* . . 1st Field Squadron, R.E.

*Signal Service* . 1st Signal Squadron.

*A.S.C.* . . . H.Q. 1st Cavalry Divisional A.S.C.

*Medical Units* . 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Cavalry Field Ambulances.

*5th Cavalry Brigade (and attached troops)*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General Sir P. W. Chetwode, Bart., D.S.O.

2nd Dragoons (Royal Scots Greys);
12th (Prince of Wales's Royal) Lancers;
20th Hussars;
with J Battery R.H.A. and Ammunition Column;
4th Field Troop;
5th Signal Troop;
5th Cavalry Field Ambulance.

*I. Corps*

G.O.C. . . . . Lieut.-General Sir D. Haig, K.C.B., K.C.I.E., K.C.V.O., A.D.C.-Gen.

Brigadier-General, General Staff — Brigadier-General J. E. Gough, V.C., C.M.G., A.D.C.

Brigadier-General, Royal Artillery — Brigadier-General H. S. Horne, C.B.

Colonel, Royal Engineers . Brigadier-General S. R. Rice, C.B.

*1st Division*

G.O.C. . . . . Major-General S. H. Lomax.

G.S.O. 1 . . . . . Colonel R. Fanshawe, D.S.O.

C.R.A. . . . . Brigadier-General N. D. Findlay, C.B.

C.R.E. . . . . Lieut.-Colonel A. L. Schreiber, D.S.O.

[1] H Battery R.H.A. was sent out in September to replace L Battery.

*1st (Guards) Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General F. I. Maxse, C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O.

1st Coldstream Guards;
1st Scots Guards;
1st The Black Watch (Royal Highlanders);
2nd The Royal Munster Fusiliers.[1]

*2nd Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General E. S. Bulfin, C.V.O., C.B.

2nd The Royal Sussex Regiment;
1st The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment;
1st The Northamptonshire Regiment;
2nd The King's Royal Rifle Corps.

*3rd Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General H. J. S. Landon, C.B.

1st The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment);
1st The South Wales Borderers;
1st The Gloucestershire Regiment;
2nd The Welch Regiment.

*Divisional Troops*

*Mounted Troops* . A Squadron, 15th (The King's) Hussars.
1st Cyclist Company.

*Artillery*[2] . . XXV. Brigade R.F.A.,
113th, 114th and 115th Batteries;
XXV. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XXVI. Brigade R.F.A.,
116th, 117th and 118th Batteries;
XXVI. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XXXIX. Brigade R.F.A.,
46th, 51st and 54th Batteries;
XXXIX. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XLIII. (Howitzer) Brigade R.F.A.,
30th, 40th and 57th (Howitzer) Batteries;
XLIII. (Howitzer) Brigade Ammunition Column.

26th Heavy Battery R.G.A., and
Heavy Battery Ammunition Column.

1st Divisional Ammunition Column.

[1] In September the 1/Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders replaced the 2/Royal Munster Fusiliers in the 1st (Guards) Brigade.

[2] An Anti-Aircraft Detachment (of 1-pdr. Pom-Poms) was added to the Divisional Artillery in September.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Engineers* | 23rd Field Company, R.E.<br>26th Field Company, R.E. |
| *Signal Service* | 1st Signal Company. |
| *A.S.C.* | 1st Divisional Train. |
| *Medical Units* | 1st, 2nd and 3rd Field Ambulances. |

*2nd Division*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Major-General C. C. Monro, C.B |
| G.S.O. 1 | Colonel Hon. F. Gordon, D.S.O. |
| C.R.A. | Brigadier-General E. M. Perceval, D.S.O. |
| C.R.E. | Lieut.-Colonel R. H. H. Boys, D.S.O. |

*4th (Guards) Brigade*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Brigadier-General R. Scott-Kerr, C.B., M.V.O., D.S.O. |
| | 2nd Grenadier Guards ;<br>2nd Coldstream Guards ;<br>3rd Coldstream Guards ;<br>1st Irish Guards. |

*5th Infantry Brigade*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Brigadier-General R. C. B. Haking, C.B. |
| | 2nd The Worcestershire Regiment ;<br>2nd The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry ;<br>2nd The Highland Light Infantry ;<br>2nd The Connaught Rangers. |

*6th Infantry Brigade*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Brigadier-General R. H. Davies, C.B. (New Zealand Staff Corps). |
| | 1st The King's (Liverpool Regiment) ;<br>2nd The South Staffordshire Regiment ;<br>1st Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire Regiment) ;<br>1st The King's Royal Rifle Corps. |

*Divisional Troops*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mounted Troops* | B Squadron 15th (The King's) Hussars.<br>2nd Cyclist Company. |
| *Artillery*[1] | XXXIV. Brigade R.F.A.,<br>22nd, 50th and 70th Batteries ;<br>XXXIV. Brigade Ammunition Column. |

[1] An Anti-Aircraft Detachment (of 1-pdr. Pom-Poms) was added to the Divisional Artillery in September.

| | |
|---|---|
| | XXXVI. Brigade R.F.A.,<br>15th, 48th and 71st Batteries;<br>XXXVI. Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | XLI. Brigade R.F.A.,<br>9th, 16th and 17th Batteries;<br>XLI. Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | XLIV. (Howitzer) Brigade R.F.A.,<br>47th, 56th and 60th (Howitzer) Batteries;<br>XLIV. (Howitzer) Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | 35th Heavy Battery R.G.A., and<br>Heavy Battery Ammunition Column. |
| | 2nd Divisional Ammunition Column. |
| *Engineers* . . | 5th Field Company, R.E.<br>11th Field Company, R.E. |
| *Signal Service* . | 2nd Signal Company. |
| *A.S.C.* . . . | 2nd Divisional Train. |
| *Medical Units* . | 4th, 5th and 6th Field Ambulances. |

*II. Corps*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. . . . . | (1) Lieut.-General Sir J. M. Grierson, K.C.B., C.V.O., C.M.G., A.D.C.-Gen.<br>(Died in the train, between Rouen and Amiens, 17th August 1914).<br>(2) General Sir H. L. Smith-Dorrien, G.C.B., D.S.O.<br>(Took over command of II. Corps at Bavai, 4 P.M., 21st August 1914). |
| Brigadier-General, General Staff | Brigadier-General G. T. Forestier-Walker, A.D.C. |
| Brigadier-General, Royal Artillery | Brigadier-General A. H. Short. |
| Colonel, Royal Engineers . | Brigadier-General A. E. Sandbach, C.B., D.S O. |

*3rd Division*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. . . . . | Major-General Hubert I. W. Hamilton, C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O. |
| G.S.O. 1 . . . . | Colonel F. R. F. Boileau. |
| C.R.A. . . . . | Brigadier-General F. D. V. Wing, C.B. |
| C.R.E. . . . . | Lieut.-Colonel C. S. Wilson. |

*7th Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General F. W. N. McCracken, C.B., D.S.O.

3rd The Worcestershire Regiment ;
2nd The Prince of Wales's Volunteers (South Lancashire Regiment) ;
1st The Duke of Edinburgh's (Wiltshire Regiment) ;
2nd The Royal Irish Rifles.

*8th Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General B. J. C. Doran, C.B.

2nd The Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment) ;
2nd The Royal Irish Regiment ;
4th The Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment) ;
1st The Gordon Highlanders.[1]

*9th Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General F. C. Shaw, C.B.

1st The Northumberland Fusiliers ;
4th The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) ;
1st The Lincolnshire Regiment ;
1st The Royal Scots Fusiliers.

*Divisional Troops*

*Mounted Troops* . C Squadron 15th (The King's) Hussars.
3rd Cyclist Company.

*Artillery*[2] . . XXIII. Brigade R.F.A.,
107th, 108th and 109th Batteries ;
XXIII. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XL. Brigade R.F.A.,
6th, 23rd and 49th Batteries ;
XL. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XLII. Brigade R.F.A.,
29th, 41st and 45th Batteries ;
XLII. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XXX. (Howitzer) Brigade R.F.A.,
128th, 129th and 130th (Howitzer) Batteries ;
XXX. (Howitzer) Brigade Ammunition Column.

48th Heavy Battery R.G.A., and
Heavy Battery Ammunition Column.

3rd Divisional Ammunition Column.

[1] In September the 1/Devonshire Regiment replaced the 1/Gordon Highlanders in the 8th Infantry Brigade.
[2] An Anti-Aircraft Detachment (of 1-pdr. Pom-Poms) was added to the Divisional Artillery in September.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Engineers* | 56th Field Company, R.E.<br>57th Field Company, R.E. |
| *Signal Service* | 3rd Signal Company. |
| *A.S.C.* | 3rd Divisional Train. |
| *Medical Units* | 7th, 8th and 9th Field Ambulances. |

*5th Division*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Major-General Sir C. Fergusson, Bart., C.B., M.V.O., D.S.O. |
| G.S.O. 1 | Lieut.-Col. C. F. Romer. |
| C.R.A. | Brigadier-General J. E. W. Headlam, C.B., D.S.O. |
| C.R.E. | Lieut.-Colonel J. A. S. Tulloch. |

*13th Infantry Brigade*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Brigadier-General G. J. Cuthbert, C.B. |
| | 2nd The King's Own Scottish Borderers ; |
| | 2nd The Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) ; |
| | 1st The Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment) ; |
| | 2nd The King's Own (Yorkshire Light Infantry). |

*14th Infantry Brigade*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Brigadier-General S. P. Rolt, C.B. |
| | 2nd The Suffolk Regiment ; |
| | 1st The East Surrey Regiment ; |
| | 1st The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry ; |
| | 2nd The Manchester Regiment. |

*15th Infantry Brigade*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. | Brigadier-General A. E. W. Count Gleichen, K.C.V.O., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Eq. |
| | 1st The Norfolk Regiment ; |
| | 1st The Bedfordshire Regiment ; |
| | 1st The Cheshire Regiment ; |
| | 1st The Dorsetshire Regiment. |

*Divisional Troops*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mounted Troops* | A Squadron 19th (Queen Alexandra's Own Royal) Hussars.<br>5th Cyclist Company. |
| *Artillery*[1] | XV. Brigade R.F.A.,<br>11th, 52nd and 80th Batteries ;<br>XV. Brigade Ammunition Column. |

[1] An Anti-Aircraft Detachment (of 1-pdr. Pom-Poms) was added to the Divisional Artillery in September.

| | |
|---|---|
| | XXVII. Brigade R.F.A.,<br>119th, 120th and 121st Batteries;<br>XXVII. Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | XXVIII. Brigade R.F.A.,<br>122nd, 123rd and 124th Batteries;<br>XXVIII. Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | VIII. (Howitzer) Brigade R.F.A.,<br>37th, 61st and 65th (Howitzer) Batteries;<br>VIII. (Howitzer) Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | 108th Heavy Battery R.G.A., and<br>Heavy Battery Ammunition Column. |
| *Engineers* . . | 17th Field Company, R.E.<br>59th Field Company, R.E. |
| *Signal Service* . | 5th Signal Company. |
| *A.S.C.* . . . | 5th Divisional Train. |
| *Medical Units* . | 13th, 14th and 15th Field Ambulances. |

*III. Corps*

(Formed in France, 31st August 1914)

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. . . . . | Major-General W. P. Pulteney, C.B., D.S.O. |
| Brigadier-General, General Staff | Brigadier-General J. P. Du Cane, C.B. |
| Brigadier-General, Royal Artillery | Brigadier-General E. J. Phipps-Hornby, V.C., C.B. |
| Colonel, Royal Engineers . | Brigadier-General F. M. Glubb, C.B., D.S.O. |

*4th Division*

(Landed in France, night 22nd/23rd August)

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. . . . . | Major-General T. D'O. Snow, C.B. |
| G.S.O. 1 . . . . . | Colonel J. E. Edmonds, C.B. |
| C.R.A. . . . . | Brigadier-General G. F. Milne, C.B., D.S.O. |
| C.R.E. . . . . | Lieut.-Colonel H. B. Jones. |

*10th Infantry Brigade*

| | |
|---|---|
| G.O.C. . . . . | Brigadier-General J. A. L. Haldane, C.B., D.S.O. |
| | 1st The Royal Warwickshire Regiment;<br>2nd Seaforth Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs, The Duke of Albany's);<br>1st Princess Victoria's (Royal Irish Fusiliers);<br>2nd The Royal Dublin Fusiliers. |

*11th Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General A. G. Hunter-Weston, C.B., D.S.O.

1st Prince Albert's (Somerset Light Infantry) ;
1st The East Lancashire Regiment ;
1st The Hampshire Regiment ;
1st The Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own).

*12th Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General H. F. M. Wilson, C.B.

1st King's Own (Royal Lancaster Regiment) ;
2nd The Lancashire Fusiliers ;
2nd The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers ;
2nd The Essex Regiment.

*Divisional Troops*[1]

*Mounted Troops* . *B Squadron 19th (Queen Alexandra's Own) Hussars.
*4th Cyclist Company.

*Artillery*[2] . . XIV. Brigade R.F.A.,
39th, 68th and 88th Batteries ;
XIV. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XXIX. Brigade R.F.A.,
125th, 126th and 127th Batteries ;
XXIX. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XXXII. Brigade R.F.A.,
27th, 134th and 135th Batteries ;
XXXII. Brigade Ammunition Column.

XXXVII. (Howitzer) Brigade R.F.A.,
31st, 35th and 55th (Howitzer) Batteries ;
XXXVII. (Howitzer) Brigade Ammunition Column.

*31st Heavy Battery R.G.A., and
*Heavy Battery Ammunition Column.

*4th Divisional Ammunition Column.

*Engineers* . . *7th Field Company, R.E.
*9th Field Company, R.E.

*Signal Service* . *4th Signal Company.

*A.S.C.* . . . *4th Divisional Train.

*Medical Units* . *10th, 11th and 12th Field Ambulances.

[1] The 4th Division were without the units marked * at the battle of Le Cateau, 26th August 1914.

[2] An Anti-Aircraft Detachment (of 1-pdr. Pom-Poms) was added to the Divisional Artillery in September.

*6th Division*

(Embarked for St. Nazaire 8th/9th September 1914)

G.O.C. . . . . Major-General J. L. Keir, C.B.
G.S.O. 1 . . . . . Colonel W. T. Furse, D.S.O.
C.R.A. . . . . Brigadier-General W. L. H. Paget, C.B., M.V.O.
C.R.E. . . . . Lieut.-Colonel G. C. Kemp.

*16th Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General E. C. Ingouville-Williams, C.B., D.S.O.
1st The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) ;
1st The Leicestershire Regiment ;
1st The King's (Shropshire Light Infantry) ;
2nd The York and Lancaster Regiment.

*17th Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General W. R. B. Doran, C.B., D.S.O.
1st The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) ;
1st The Prince of Wales's (North Staffordshire Regiment) ;
2nd The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) ;
3rd The Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own).

*18th Infantry Brigade*

G.O.C. . . . . Brigadier-General W. N. Congreve, V.C., C.B., M.V.O.
1st The Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment) ;
1st The East Yorkshire Regiment ;
2nd The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) ;
2nd The Durham Light Infantry.

*Divisional Troops*

*Mounted Troops* . C Squadron 19th (Queen Alexandra's Own) Hussars.
6th Cyclist Company.

*Artillery* [1] . . II. Brigade R.F.A.,
21st, 42nd and 53rd Batteries ;
II. Brigade Ammunition Column.

[1] An Anti-Aircraft Detachment (of 1-pdr. Pom-Poms) was added to the Divisional Artillery in September.

| | |
|---|---|
| | XXIV. Brigade R.F.A.,<br>110th, 111th and 112th Batteries ;<br>XXIV. Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | XXXVIII. Brigade R.F.A.,<br>24th, 34th and 72nd Batteries ;<br>XXXVIII. Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | XII. (Howitzer) Brigade R.F.A.,<br>43rd, 86th and 87th (Howitzer) Batteries ;<br>XII. (Howitzer) Brigade Ammunition Column. |
| | 24th Heavy Battery R.G.A., and<br>Heavy Battery Ammunition Column. |
| | 6th Divisional Ammunition Column. |
| *Engineers* . . | 12th Field Company, R.E.<br>38th Field Company, R.E. |
| *Signal Service* . | 6th Signal Company. |
| *A.S.C.* . . . | 6th Divisional Train. |
| *Medical Units* . | 16th, 17th and 18th Field Ambulances. |

---

*Army Troops*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mounted Troops* . | A Squadron North Irish Horse,<br>B Squadron South Irish Horse,<br>C Squadron North Irish Horse. |
| *Medium Siege Artillery* [1] | Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 Siege Batteries R.G.A. |
| *Engineers* . . | Headquarters of G.H.Q., 1st, 2nd and 3rd Signal Companies ;<br>A to E Air-line Sections ;<br>F to P Cable Sections ;<br>Q Wireless Section. |

*Royal Flying Corps :* [2]

| | |
|---|---|
| Commander . . . . | Brigadier-General Sir D. Henderson, K.C.B., D.S.O. |
| G.S.O. 1 . . . . . | Lieut.-Colonel F. H. Sykes. |
| | 2nd Aeroplane Squadron. |
| | 3rd Aeroplane Squadron. |
| | 4th Aeroplane Squadron. |
| | 5th Aeroplane Squadron. |
| | 6th Aeroplane Squadron. |

[1] Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 Siege Batteries disembarked at St. Nazaire on 19th September 1914, and Nos. 5 and 6, on 27th September 1914. Each battery was armed with four 6-inch B.L. Howitzers. 39 Company R.G.A. formed Nos. 1 and 2 Batteries, 23 Company formed Nos. 3 and 4, and 107 Company formed Nos. 5 and 6.

[2] The 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Aeroplane Squadrons accompanied the first portion of the British Expeditionary Force to France in August 1914. The 6th Squadron landed at St. Nazaire on 5th October, but did not come into action until 16th October 1914.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Infantry* . . | 1st The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. |
| *A.S.C.* . . . | Army Troops Train. |
| *Medical Units* . | 19th and 20th Field Ambulances. |

---

*Lines of Communication Defence Troops*

1st The Devonshire Regiment;
[1] 2nd The Royal Welch Fusiliers;
[1] 1st The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles);
[1] 1st The Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment);
[1] 2nd Princess Louise's (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders).

*Lines of Communication Units*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Engineers* . . | Railway Transport Establishment;<br>8th and 10th Railway Companies;<br>29th Works Company;<br>20th and 42nd Fortress Companies;<br>1st Printing Company. |
| *Royal Flying Corps* | 1st Aircraft Park. |
| *Signal Service* . | 1st Signal Company, L. of C. |
| *A.S.C.* . . . | Cavalry Ammunition Park;<br>5th Cavalry Brigade Ammunition Park;<br>1st-6th Divisional Ammunition Parks;<br>Cavalry Supply Column;<br>5th Cavalry Brigade Supply Column;<br>1st-6th Divisional Supply Columns;<br>Army Troops Supply Column;<br>Base Mechanical Transport Depot;<br>Advanced Mechanical Transport Depot;<br>Base Horse Transport Depot;<br>Advanced Horse Transport Depot;<br>1st-6th Reserve Parks (2-horsed wagons);<br>1st-6th Field Butcheries;<br>1st-6th Field Bakeries;<br>1st-8th Railway Supply Detachments;<br>Central Requisition Office;<br>Branch Requisition Office;<br>1st-30th Depot Units of Supply;<br>1st-8th Bakery Sections;<br>Nos. 1 and 2 Advanced Remount Depots;<br>Base Remount Depot. |
| *Medical Units* . | 1st-6th Clearing Hospitals;<br>1st-12th Stationary Hospitals;<br>1st-12th General Hospitals;<br>1st-6th Ambulance Trains; |

[1] These four battalions were formed into the 19th Infantry Brigade, at Valenciennes, on 22nd August 1914. The command of this Brigade was given to Major-General L. G. Drummond, C.B., M.V.O.

| | |
|---|---|
| | Nos. 1, 2 and 3 Hospital Ships ;<br>1st-3rd Advanced Depots of Medical Stores ;<br>1st-3rd Base Depots of Medical Stores ;<br>1st and 2nd Sanitary Sections ;<br>1st-11th Sanitary Squads ;<br>Convalescent Depot. |
| *Ordnance Units* . | 1st-8th Ordnance Companies. |
| *Veterinary Units*[1] | 1st-7th Mobile Veterinary Sections ;<br>1st-8th Veterinary Sections ;<br>Base Depot of Veterinary Stores. |
| *Army Pay Unit* . | Base Army Pay Department Unit. |
| *Postal Units* . | Base Post Office ;<br>Advanced Base Post Office ;<br>1st and 2nd Stationary Post Offices. |
| *Prisons* . . . | Military Prisons in the Field. |
| *Bases* . . . | Nos. 1, 2 and 3 Bases. |

[1] 8th-11th Mobile Veterinary Sections were to follow as soon as they were completed.

# NOTES

ON THE

# ORGANIZATION OF SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL FORMATIONS AND UNITS OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE IN AUGUST 1914

*Royal Flying Corps*

Aeroplane Squadron = 12 Aeroplanes.

*Cavalry*

Regiment = 3 Squadrons = 12 Troops.

(Two machine guns were an integral part of each regiment.)

*Artillery*

*Royal Horse Artillery:*

Brigade = 2 R.H.A. Batteries and Brigade Ammunition Column.

(R.H.A. Battery = Six 13-pdr. Q.F. Guns and 12 Ammunition Wagons.)

*Royal Field Artillery:*

Brigade = 3 R.F.A. Batteries and Brigade Ammunition Column.

(R.F.A. Battery = Six 18-pdr. Q.F. Guns (or six 4·5-inch Howitzers) and 12 Ammunition Wagons.)

*Royal Garrison Artillery:*

Heavy Battery = Four 60-pdr. Guns, 8 Ammunition Wagons and Battery Ammunition Column.

*Infantry*

Battalion = 4 Companies = 16 Platoons.

(Two machine guns were an integral part of each battalion.)

*Medical*

Field Ambulance = 3 Sections = 10 Ambulance Wagons.
(It accommodated 150 patients.)

*Cavalry Division*

4 Cavalry Brigades = 12 Cavalry Regiments, together with Divisional Troops.

| | |
|---|---|
| Strength | 9,269 all ranks.<br>9,815 horses.<br>24 13-pdrs.<br>24 machine guns. |
| Marching depth (about) | 11½ miles. |

A Cavalry Brigade occupied nearly 2 miles of road space.

The Divisional Troops required more than 2¼ miles (Brigade Ammunition Columns taking 1 mile).

The details of personnel and horses are as follows :

| | Officers and other ranks. | Horses. |
|---|---|---|
| Headquarters | 96 | 64 |
| 4 Cav. Brigades | 6,872 | 7,492 |
| H.Q. Cav. Divl. Artillery | 20 | 18 |
| 2 Horse Artillery Brigades | 1,362 | 1,558 |
| 1 Field Squadron | 191 | 196 |
| 1 Signal Squadron | 206 | 164 |
| H.Q. Cav. Divl. A.S.C. | 26 | 11 |
| 4 Cav. Field Ambulances | 496 | 312 |
| Total | 9,269 | 9,815 |

*Division*

3 Infantry Brigades = 12 Infantry Battalions, together with Divisional Troops.

| | |
|---|---|
| Strength | 18,073 all ranks.<br>5,592 horses.<br>76 guns (fifty-four 18-pdrs., eighteen 4·5-inch Howitzers and four 60-pdrs.).<br>24 machine guns. |
| Marching depth (about) | 15 miles. |

An Infantry Brigade occupied 2¼ miles of road space.

The Divisional Artillery (less Divisional Ammunition Column) occupied 5 miles (Brigade Ammunition Columns taking 1⅓ miles).

The Divisional Ammunition Column required nearly another 1½ miles.

Ambulances and Divisional Trains occupied 1⅔ miles.

The details of personnel and horses are as follows :

| | Officers and other ranks. | Horses. |
|---|---|---|
| Headquarters | 82 | 54 |
| 3 Infantry Brigades | 12,165 | 741 |
| H.Q. Divl. Artillery | 22 | 20 |
| 3 Field Artillery Brigades | 2,385 | 2,244 |
| 1 Field Artillery (Howitzer) Brigade | 755 | 697 |
| 1 Heavy Battery and Amm. Column | 198 | 144 |
| 1 Divl. Amm. Column | 568 | 709 |
| H.Q. Divl. Engineers | 13 | 8 |
| 2 Field Companies | 434 | 152 |
| 1 Signal Company | 162 | 80 |
| 1 Cavalry Squadron | 159 | 167 |
| 1 Divisional Train | 428 | 378 |
| 3 Field Ambulances | 702 | 198 |
| Total | 18,073 | 5,592 |

# ORDER OF BATTLE

OF THE

# FRENCH ARMIES IN AUGUST 1914 [1]

Commander-in-Chief . General Joffre.
Chief of the General Staff General Belin.

FIRST ARMY . . . General Dubail.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| VII. Corps | (14th and 41st Divisions) | General Bonneau ; |
| VIII. Corps | (15th and 16th Divisions) | General Castelli ; |
| XIII. Corps | (25th and 26th Divisions) | General Alix ; |
| XIV. Corps | (27th and 28th Divisions) | General Pouradier-Duteil ; |
| XXI. Corps | (13th and 43rd Divisions) | General Legrand-Girarde ; |

44th Division ;
An Alpine Group ;
1st Group of Reserve Divisions (58th, 63rd and 66th) ;
6th and 8th Cavalry Divisions.[2]

SECOND ARMY . . . General de Castelnau.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| IX. Corps | (17th and 18th Divisions, with Moroccan Division attached) | General Dubois ; |
| XV. Corps | (29th and 30th Divisions) | General Espinasse ; |
| XVI. Corps | (31st and 32nd Divisions) | General Taverna ; |
| XVIII. Corps [3] | (35th and 36th Divisions) | General Mas-Latrie ; |
| XX. Corps | (11th and 39th Divisions) | General Foch ; |

2nd Group of Reserve Divisions (59th, 65th and 70th) ;
A Mixed Colonial Brigade ;
2nd and 10th Cavalry Divisions.[2]

THIRD ARMY . . . General Ruffey.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| IV. Corps | (7th and 8th Divisions) | General Boëlle ; |
| V. Corps | (9th and 10th Divisions) | General Brochin ; |

[1] The authorities are : " La Bataille de la Frontière " by F. Engerand, " De Liége à la Marne " by F. Dauzet, and " La Grande Guerre " (vols. ii. and iii.) by General Palat.

[2] Early in September three of the cavalry divisions (2nd, 8th and 10th) of the First and Second Armies were formed into a cavalry corps under General Conneau.

[3] This corps was transferred later on to the French Fifth Army, and operated on the right flank of the British Expeditionary Force.

VI. Corps (12th, 40th and 42nd Divs.) General Sarrail ;
3rd Group of Reserve Divisions (54th, 55th and 56th) ;
7th Cavalry Division.

FOURTH ARMY . . . General de Langle de Cary,

XII. Corps (23rd and 24th Divisions) General Roques ;
XVII. Corps (33rd and 34th Divisions) General Poline ;
Colonial Corps (1st, 2nd and 3rd Colonial Divisions) General Lefevre ;
9th Cavalry Division.

FIFTH ARMY . . . General Lanrezac.

I. Corps (1st and 2nd Divisions) General Franchet d'Esperey ;
II. Corps[1] (3rd and 4th Divisions) General Gerard ;
III. Corps (5th and 6th Divisions) General Sauret ;
X. Corps (19th and 20th Divisions) General Defforges ;
XI. Corps[2] (21st and 22nd Divisions) General Eydoux ;
and 38th Division ;
4th Group of Reserve Divisions (51st, 53rd and 69th, General Valabrègue) ;
52nd Reserve Division ;[2]
60th Reserve Division ;[2]
4th Cavalry Division.

CAVALRY CORPS . . General Sordet.

1st Cavalry Division . . . General Buisson.
2nd Cuirassier Brigade ;
5th Dragoon Brigade ;
11th Dragoon Brigade ;
Horse Artillery Brigade (two 4-gun batteries) ;
Cyclists.

3rd Cavalry Division . . . General de Lastour.
4th Cuirassier Brigade ;
13th Dragoon Brigade ;
3rd Light Cavalry Brigade ;
Horse Artillery Brigade (two 4-gun batteries) ;
Cyclists.

5th Cavalry Division . . . General Bridoux.
3rd Dragoon Brigade ;
7th Dragoon Brigade ;
5th Light Cavalry Brigade ;
Horse Artillery Brigade (two 4-gun batteries) ;
Cyclists.

[1] The II. Corps was transferred to the Fourth Army on the arrival of the 37th and 38th Divisions from Africa.
[2] The XI. Corps and 52nd and 60th Reserve Divisions went to the Fourth Army on arrival of the XVIII. Corps from the Second Army.

# NOTES

ON THE

## ORGANIZATION OF SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL FRENCH FORMATIONS AND UNITS IN 1914

### *Cavalry*

Cavalry Brigade = 2 regiments and machine-gun section.
Cavalry Regiment (32 officers, 651 other ranks, 687 horses) = 4 squadrons.
Cavalry Squadron = 5 officers, 145 other ranks, and 143 horses.

### *Artillery*

*Field :*

| | |
|---|---|
| Regiment (Divisional) | = 3 *groupes*. |
| Regiment (Corps) | = 4 *groupes*. |
| *Groupe* | = 3 batteries. |
| Battery | = 4 guns, 12 wagons, etc. |

*Heavy :* [1]

| | |
|---|---|
| Regiment | Strength variable ; those in Second and Fifth Armies consisted of six 120-mm. batteries and seven 155-mm. batteries.<br>The 4th Regiment had 5 *groupes* of four 120-mm. batteries each. |
| *Groupe* | = three or four batteries. |
| Battery | = 4 guns, 8 wagons, observation wagon, etc. |

### *Infantry*

| | |
|---|---|
| Brigade | = 2 regiments. |
| Regiment | = 3 battalions and H.Q. company. |
| Battalion | = 4 companies and a machine-gun section (22 officers and 1,030 other ranks), etc. |
| Company | = 2 *pelotons* each of 2 *sections*. |

[1] Allotted to Armies and corps.

*Cavalry Division*

3 Cavalry Brigades;
1 Horse Artillery Brigade (of two 4-gun batteries);
*Groupe cycliste* (4 officers and 320 other ranks);
Telegraph detachment, etc.

4,500 all ranks and 8 guns.

*Division*

2 Infantry Brigades;
1 Squadron;
3 Field Artillery *groupes*;
Engineer Company, etc.

15,000 all ranks, 36 guns and 24 machine guns.

*Reserve Division*

2 Brigades;[1]
1 Squadron;
3 Field Artillery *groupes*, etc.
Reserve Brigade =3 regiments and a *chasseur* battalion
Reserve Regiment=2 battalions.

*Corps*

Normally two divisions (VI. and Colonial Corps had three);
1 Cavalry Regiment;
Field Artillery Regiment;
1 Groupe of 155-cm. Howitzers;
1 Engineer Company;
Reserve Infantry Brigade of two regiments of two battalions each.

[1] From "La 56e Division au feu" by General de Dartein, pp. 4, 28.

# ORDER OF BATTLE

OF THE

# BELGIAN ARMY IN AUGUST 1914 [1]

| | |
|---|---|
| Commander-in-Chief . . | His Majesty King Albert. |
| Chief of the General Staff . | Lieut.-General Chevalier de Selliers de Moranville. |
| 1st Division . . . | Lieut.-General Baix. |
| 2nd Division . . . | Lieut.-General Dassin. |
| 3rd Division . . . | Lieut.-General Leman. |
| 4th Division . . . | Lieut.-General Michel. |
| 5th Division . . . | Lieut.-General Ruwet. |
| 6th Division . . . | Lieut.-General Latonnois van Rode. |
| Cavalry Division . . | Lieut.-General de Witte. |
| Garrisons of Antwerp, Liége and Namur. | |

A Belgian division consisted of three mixed brigades, a cavalry regiment, and an artillery regiment of three batteries,[2] together with engineers, telegraphists, transport, etc.

A mixed brigade consisted of two infantry regiments and an artillery group of three batteries. Each infantry regiment had three battalions, and one regiment in each brigade had a machine-gun company (6 machine guns).

The strength of a division varied between 25,500 and 32,000 all ranks, with 60 guns and 18 machine guns.

The Cavalry Division had two cavalry brigades (each of two cavalry regiments), three Horse Artillery batteries (12 guns), a cyclist battalion, a cyclist pioneer bridging company, telegraphists, and transport.

The strength of the Cavalry Division was 4,500 all ranks, with 3,400 horses, and 12 guns.

[1] Field Notes on the Belgian, French and German Armies (1914).

[2] Two divisions (2nd and 6th) each had three extra batteries. The batteries were all 4-gun units.

# ORDER OF BATTLE

OF THE

# GERMAN ARMIES [1]

| | |
|---|---|
| Chief of the General Staff | Generaloberst von Moltke. |
| Deputy Chief of the General Staff | General von Stein. |
| Chief of Operations Branch | Oberst Tappen. |
| Chief of Intelligence Branch | Oberstleutnant Hentsch. |
| Chief of Secret Service | Major Nicolai. |
| Chief of the Political Section | Oberst von Dommes. |
| Intendant-General (supplies, clothing, etc.) | Generalmajor von Schoeler. |
| Personal Services | Oberst von Fabeck. |
| Director of Munitions in the Field | Generalleutnant Sieger. |
| Chief of Staff of Air Service | Major Thomsen. |
| Director of Field Railways | Oberst Groener. |
| General of Engineers and Pioneer Corps | General von Claer. |
| Director of Medical Services | General von Schjerning. |

(1) ARMIES EMPLOYED AGAINST THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, THE FRENCH FIFTH ARMY, AND THE BELGIAN ARMY IN AUGUST 1914

FIRST ARMY: Generaloberst von Kluck.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| II. Corps | von Linsingen | (3rd and 4th Divisions); |
| III. Corps | von Lochow | (5th and 6th Divisions); |
| IV. Corps | Sixt von Armin | (7th and 8th Divisions); |
| IX. Corps | von Quast | (17th and 18th Divisions); |
| III. Reserve Corps | von Beseler | (5th Reserve and 6th Reserve Divisions); |
| IV. Reserve Corps | von Gronau | (7th Reserve and 22nd Reserve Divisions); |

[1] Based principally on "Schlachten und Gefechte," von Falkenhayn, von Hausen, and "Lüttich-Namur" (issued by the German General Staff of the Field Army).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| IX. Reserve Corps | von Boehn [1] | (17th Reserve and 18th Reserve Divisions); |

10th, 11th and 27th *Landwehr* Brigades;
1 *Pionier* regiment.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| SECOND ARMY: | Generaloberst von Bülow. | |
| Guard Corps | von Plettenberg | (1st Guard and 2nd Guard Divisions); |
| VII. Corps | von Einem | (13th and 14th Divisions); |
| X. Corps | von Emmich | (19th and 20th Divisions); |
| Guard Reserve Corps [2] | von Gallwitz | (3rd Guard and 1st Guard Reserve Divisions); |
| VII. Reserve Corps | von Zwehl | (13th Reserve and 14th Reserve Divisions); |
| X. Reserve Corps | Graf von Kirchbach | (2nd Guard Reserve and 19th Reserve Divisions); |

25th and 29th *Landwehr* Brigades;
4 Mortar battalions;
1 10 cm.-gun battalion;
2 Heavy Coast Mortar battalions;
2 *Pionier* regiments.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| THIRD ARMY: | Generaloberst Freiherr von Hausen. | |
| XI. Corps [2] | von Plüskow | (22nd and 38th Divisions); |
| XII. (1st Saxon) Corps | d'Elsa | (23rd and 32nd Divisions); |
| XIX. (2nd Saxon) Corps | von Laffert | (24th and 40th Divisions); |
| XII. (Saxon) Reserve Corps | von Kirchbach | (23rd Reserve and 24th Reserve Divisions); |

47th *Landwehr* Brigade;
2 Mortar battalions;
1 *Pionier* regiment.

I. CAVALRY CORPS: Lieut.-General Freiherr von Richthofen.
Guard Cavalry Division;
5th Cavalry Division.

II. CAVALRY CORPS: Lieut.-General von der Marwitz.
2nd Cavalry Division;
4th Cavalry Division;
9th Cavalry Division.

(2) NOT OPPOSED TO THE BRITISH IN AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 1914

| | |
|---|---|
| FOURTH ARMY: | Generaloberst Duke Albrecht of Württemberg. |
| VI. Corps [3] | von Pritzelwitz. |
| VIII. Corps | von Weidenbach. |

[1] This corps was originally left behind in Sleswig to oppose landings, and as it hurried up behind the advance it sacked Louvain, 25th August 1914.

[2] These two corps (Guard Reserve and XI.) began to move to the Russian front on the 26th of August, after the fall of Namur.

[3] To Fifth Army, 28th August.

XVIII. Corps . . . . . von Schenk.
VIII. Reserve Corps . . . . . von Egloffstein.
XVIII. Reserve Corps . . . . . von Steuben.
49th *Landwehr* Brigade, 2 Mortar battalions and a *Pionier* regiment.

FIFTH ARMY: Crown Prince of Germany.

V. Corps . . . . . von Strantz.
XIII. Corps . . . . . von Fabeck.
XVI. Corps . . . . . von Mudra.
V. Reserve Corps . . . . . von Gündell.
VI. Reserve Corps . . . . . von Gossler.
33rd Reserve Division
IV. Cavalry Corps (3rd and 6th Cavalry Divisions) . . . von Hollen.
13th, 43rd, 45th, 33rd and 9th Bavarian *Landwehr* Brigades; 4 Mortar battalions and 2 *Pionier* battalions.

SIXTH ARMY: Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria.

XXI. Corps . . . . . Fritz von Below.
I. Bavarian Corps . . . . . von Xylander.
II. Bavarian Corps . . . . . von Martini.
III. Bavarian Corps . . . . . von Gebsattel.
I. Bavarian Reserve Corps . . von Fasbender.
III. Cavalry Corps (7th, 8th and Bavarian Cavalry Divisions) von Frommel.
Guard *Ersatz* Division;
4th, 7th and 8th *Ersatz* Divisions.

SEVENTH ARMY: Generaloberst von Heeringen.

XIV. Corps . . . . . von Heiningen.
XV. Corps . . . . . von Deimling.
XIV. Reserve Corps . . . . . von Schubert.
Strasbourg Reserve Division;
19th and Bavarian *Ersatz* Divisions.
109th, 112th, 114th, 142nd *Landwehr* Regiments.

*Total on Western Front:*

45 divisions;
27 Reserve divisions;
10 cavalry divisions;
6 *Ersatz* divisions (17 brigades);
14 *Landwehr* brigades;
15 artillery battalions;
7 *Pionier* regiments.

(3) RUSSIAN FRONTIER

EIGHTH ARMY: Generaloberst von Prittwitz.

I. Corps . . . . . von François.
XVII. Corps . . . . . von Mackensen.

| | |
|---|---|
| XX. Corps . . . . . | von Scholtz. |
| I. Reserve Corps . . . . | Otto von Below. |
| 3rd Reserve Division ; | |
| 1st Cavalry Division ; | |
| 5th *Ersatz* Division ; | |
| 6th and 70th *Landwehr* Brigades ; | |
| von der Goltz's *Landwehr* Division.[1] | |

[1] Originally in Sleswig to oppose landings ; arrived in East Prussia on 28th August 1914.

# NOTES

ON THE

## ORGANIZATION OF SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL GERMAN FORMATIONS AND UNITS IN 1914[1]

*Air Forces :*

Field Balloon Detachment = 2 Balloons.
Gas Column.
Flying Detachment (*Flieger Abteilung*) = 12 Aeroplanes.
(One Balloon Detachment was allotted to each Army, and one Flying Detachment was allotted to each Army and corps.)

*Cavalry :*

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Brigade | = 2 Regiments. |
| Cavalry Regiment | (36 officers, 686 other ranks and 765 horses) = 4 Squadrons, Telegraph Detachment, and 1st and 2nd line transport. |
| Squadron | = 6 officers, 163 other ranks and 178 horses. |

*Artillery, Field :*

| | |
|---|---|
| Brigade | = 2 Regiments. (72 guns). |
| Regiment | = 2 *Abteilungen*. |
| *Abteilung* | = 3 Batteries and Light Ammunition Column. |
| Battery | = 6 guns, 6 ammunition wagons (4 of each in horse batteries), 1 Observation Wagon, and 1st and 2nd line transport. |

*Artillery, Foot (Heavy), of the Field Army :*

| | |
|---|---|
| Regiment | = 2 Battalions. |
| Battalion | = 4 Batteries of 5·9-inch (15-c.m.) howitzers, or 2 Batteries of 8·27-inch (21-c.m.) mortars. |
| Battery | = 4 guns. |

*Infantry :*

| | |
|---|---|
| Brigade | = 2 Regiments. |
| Regiment | = 3 Battalions and a machine-gun company of 6 guns and one spare gun. |

[1] The complete Order of Battle of the German First Army will be found in von Kluck's "March on Paris" (translation Edward Arnold, 10s.).

| | |
|---|---|
| Battalion | =4 Companies (26 officers and officials and 1,050 other ranks) and 1st and 2nd line transport. |
| Battalion of *Jäger* or *Schützen* | =4 Companies and a machine-gun company (4 officers and 104 other ranks) and a Cyclist Company (3 officers and 113 other ranks). |
| Company | =3 Platoons (5 officers and 259 other ranks). |

*Cavalry Division:*

3 Cavalry Brigades.
Divisional Troops:
Horse Artillery *Abteilung* (three 4-gun batteries);
1, 2 or 3 *Jäger* battalions, each with machine-gun company of 6 guns;
Machine-gun battery (mounted);
*Pionier* Detachment;
Heavy and Light Wireless Stations;
Motor Transport Column.

5,200 all ranks. 5,600 horses. 12 guns. 6 machine guns.

*Infantry Division:*

2 Infantry Brigades.
Divisional Troops:
1 Field Artillery Brigade (72 guns);
1 Cavalry Regiment;
1 or 2 *Pionier* Companies (3 per corps);
1 Divisional Bridging Train;
1 Divisional Telephone Detachment;
1 or 2 Medical Companies (3 per corps).

17,500 all ranks. 4,000 horses. 72 guns. 24 machine guns.

*Cavalry Corps:*

2 or 3 Cavalry Divisions.

*Corps:*

2 Infantry Divisions.
Corps Troops:
1 Foot Artillery Regiment;
1 *Jäger* Battalion;
1 Corps Bridging Train;
1 Telephone Detachment;
1 Searchlight Section;
1 Flying Detachment;
4 Infantry Ammunition Columns;
9 Field Artillery Ammunition Columns;
8 Heavy Artillery Ammunition Columns;
12 Field Hospitals;
6 Supply Columns;
7 Transport Columns;
2 Horse Depots;
2 Field Bakeries.

*Reserve Division :*

Same as Active division, except it has 6 Field batteries instead of 12.

*Reserve Corps :*

Same as Active corps, except it has 12 Field batteries instead of 24, no heavy guns, no aeroplanes and correspondingly fewer ammunition columns.

*Landwehr Brigade :*

2 Regiments of three battalions ;
1 Squadron ;
1 Battery.

# INSTRUCTIONS TO SIR JOHN FRENCH FROM LORD KITCHENER

## AUGUST 1914

"Owing to the infringement of the neutrality of Belgium by "Germany, and in furtherance of the Entente which exists between "this country and France, His Majesty's Government has decided, "at the request of the French Government, to send an Expeditionary "Force to France and to entrust the command of the troops to "yourself.

"The special motive of the Force under your control is to sup- "port and co-operate with the French Army against our common "enemies. The peculiar task laid upon you is to assist the French "Government in preventing or repelling the invasion by Germany "of French and Belgian territory and eventually to restore the "neutrality of Belgium, on behalf of which, as guaranteed by "treaty, Belgium has appealed to the French and to ourselves.

"These are the reasons which have induced His Majesty's "Government to declare war, and these reasons constitute the "primary objective you have before you.

"The place of your assembly, according to present arrangements, "is Amiens, and during the assembly of your troops you will have "every opportunity for discussing with the Commander-in-Chief of "the French Army, the military position in general and the special "part which your Force is able and adapted to play. It must be "recognized from the outset that the numerical strength of the "British Force and its contingent reinforcement is strictly limited, "and with this consideration kept steadily in view it will be obvious "that the greatest care must be exercised towards a minimum of "losses and wastage.

"Therefore, while every effort must be made to coincide most "sympathetically with the plans and wishes of our Ally, the gravest "consideration will devolve upon you as to participation in forward "movements where large bodies of French troops are not engaged "and where your Force may be unduly exposed to attack. Should "a contingency of this sort be contemplated, I look to you to inform "me fully and give me time to communicate to you any decision to "which His Majesty's Government may come in the matter. In "this connection I wish you distinctly to understand that your "command is an entirely independent one, and that you will in no "case come in any sense under the orders of any Allied General.

"In minor operations you should be careful that your sub-

" ordinates understand that risk of serious losses should only be " taken where such risk is authoritatively considered to be com- " mensurate with the object in view.

" The high courage and discipline of your troops should, and " certainly will, have fair and full opportunity of display during the " campaign, but officers may well be reminded that in this their " first experience of European warfare, a greater measure of caution " must be employed than under former conditions of hostilities " against an untrained adversary.

" You will kindly keep up constant communication with the " War Office, and you will be good enough to inform me as to all " movements of the enemy reported to you as well as to those of " the French Army.

" I am sure you fully realize that you can rely with the utmost " confidence on the whole-hearted and unswerving support of the " Government, of myself, and of your compatriots, in carrying out " the high duty which the King has entrusted to you and in main- " taining the great tradition of His Majesty's Army."

KITCHENER,
Secretary of State.

# THE FRENCH PLAN OF CAMPAIGN[1]

PLAN 17

(Translation)

*Note.*—Each Army Commander received on the 7th February, 1914, a copy of the section of this document that referred to his command: their receipts for it being kept in a special file by the 3rd Bureau of the (French) General Staff. BELIN.[2]

## DIRECTIONS FOR THE CONCENTRATION

*General Situation.*

From a careful study of information obtained, it is probable that a great part of the German forces will be concentrated on the common frontier. They may cross this frontier in places before our general operations can be developed.

*Intentions of the Commander-in-Chief.*

Whatever the circumstances, it is the C.-in-C.'s intention to advance with all forces united to the attack of the German Armies.

The action of the French Armies will be developed in two main operations: one, on the right, in the country between the wooded district of the Vosges and the Moselle below Toul; the other, on the left, north of a line Verdun—Metz.

These two operations will be closely connected by forces operating on the Hauts de Meuse and in the Woëvre.

*General distribution of the forces in the theatre of operations.*

The First and Second Armies will at first operate between the Rhine and the Moselle below Toul, prolonged west of that place by the Marne-Rhine Canal, and the line Vaucouleurs—Gondrecourt.

The Fifth Army and the Cavalry Corps will operate north of the line Verdun—Metz.

The Third Army will act as connecting link between these two operations.

The Fourth Army will be provisionally placed in second line ready to move up either south or north of the Third Army; an

[1] This was the plan in force when hostilities commenced. It is translated from Appendix III. of "La Bataille de la Frontière (Août 1914) Briey" by M. Fernand Engerand, Député de Calvados.

[2] General Belin, General Joffre's first Chief of the Staff.

alternative detrainment of part of this Fourth Army has consequently to be provided for. and eventually a change in the composition of the other Armies.

The two groups of Reserve divisions which will be at the disposal of the commander-in-chief, are at first to be placed in rear of the wings of the general front.

### First Army

Five corps (VII., VIII., XIII., XIV., XXI.). Two cavalry divisions (6th and 8th).

Five regiments of heavy artillery (six batteries of 120 B., six batteries of 155 C.T.R.) ;[1] two groups at Epinal.

*General idea.*

This Army will attack in the general direction Baccarat—Sarrebourg—Sarreguemines—the right of its main body following the crest of the Vosges, and its extreme right advancing into the plains of Alsace, so that the right of the whole battle front may rest on the Rhine.

By this advance it will be able to co-operate with the offensive of the Second Army which is to be made in the direction of Château Salins.

The First Army may be called upon to move out from the Meurthe on the 12th day of mobilization. As a preliminary measure it will as early as possible be in a position to drive back the enemy from the eastern slopes of the Vosges, north of the Schlucht, but at the same time it will avoid becoming engaged with any strong forces in the Alsatian plain.

A part of this Army will advance as early as possible, on the order of the commander-in-chief, into Upper Alsace by the Belfort gap, the pass of the Schlucht and the intermediate passes, in the general direction of Colmar.

*Special idea for the group operating in Alsace.*

The order to advance into Alsace may be given by the commander-in-chief any time after the fourth day of mobilization.

The part of the First Army to carry out this operation will consist of the VII. Corps and the 8th Cavalry Division.

Its special idea is to hold in Alsace, by attacking them, any enemy forces which may attempt to advance on the eastern slopes of the Vosges, and to assist the removal of that part of the population of Alsace that has remained faithful to the cause of France.

### Second Army

Five corps (IX., XV., XVI., XVIII., XX.). Two cavalry divisions (2nd and 10th).

One regiment of heavy artillery (3rd Regiment : six batteries of 120 L.) ; seven batteries of 155 C.T.R., one group of four batteries of 120 L.[2] (of the 4th Regiment).

2nd Group of Reserve divisions (59th, 65th, 70th).

Headquarters : Neufchâteau.

[1] 120 B. =120-mm. Bacquet (name of inventor).
155 C.T.R.=155-mm. court tir rapide.

[2] 120 L.=120-mm. long.

*General idea.*

This Army is to be ready to attack in the general direction Château Salins—Sarrebruck. For this purpose, it will make use of the Nancy bridgehead, for the protection of which it will be responsible. Its dispositions will be made so that it can at first occupy a front Lunéville—Grand Couronné de Nancy, from which line it may be called upon to advance on the 12th day of mobilization.

It should be possible to send the 2nd Group of Reserve divisions to the area north of Nancy as they detrain, so as to oppose any possible operation of German forces coming from Metz and to assure the protection of the left flank of the Second Army.

### Third Army

Three corps (IV., V., VI.). One cavalry division (7th).

One regiment of heavy artillery (part of the 2nd Regiment: three batteries of 120 L.); three batteries of 155 C.T.R., three groups of four batteries of 120 L. (of the 4th Regiment).

3rd Group of Reserve divisions (54th, 55th, 56th).

Headquarters: Verdun.

*Zone of operations.*

To the south, bounded by the line Lerouville (inclusive)—Hauts de Meuse.

To the south-east by the line Girauvoisin—fortress of Toul (inclusive)—the Moselle below Toul.

To the north by the line (inclusive) Villosne sur Meuse—Haraucourt—Ecurey (N.W. of Damvillers)—Damvillers—Romagne sur les Côtes (E. of Damvillers).

*General idea.*

The Third Army forming the connecting link between the main operations to be carried out on the right bank of the Moselle, to the south, and north of the line Verdun—Metz, to the north, will be ready either to force back on to Metz and Thionville any enemy forces which may have advanced from the direction of these fortresses, or to prepare the preliminary investment of Metz.

It will be responsible for the protection of the Hauts de Meuse on which its operations will be based. For this purpose it will employ the group of Reserve divisions and the heavy artillery which are allotted to it to hold the positions the occupation of which has been planned. The same units are intended to enable the Army afterwards to organize, as mentioned above, the investment of Metz.

It will be ready to make a general offensive from a line Domèvre en Haye—Vigneulles les Hattonchatel—Ornes any time after the 12th day of mobilization; it will at first co-ordinate its movements with the Second Army on the right and with the Fifth Army on the left.

Consequently, it will be necessary for it to keep a considerable force always in reserve in order to extend, according to circumstances, the operations of the Second Army on the right bank of the Moselle or those of the Fifth Army in the northern Woëvre.

*Additional directions for the Third and Fifth Armies*

1. The II. Corps will be responsible for organizing the south-eastern front, that is to say the high ground of Ire le Sec, between the Loison (Jametz district) and the Othain (Marville district).

2. The organization for defence of the Hauts de Meuse, from Ornes to Damvillers along the Côtes de Romagne and de Morimont, will be carried out by the Third Army. It will be defended by any available units of the IV. Corps, which will be relieved as soon as possible by the 54th Reserve Division.

3. The 4th Infantry Division covering the northern Woëvre will have a detachment (six companies of the 120th Regt.) in the Azannes district to keep touch with the fortress of Verdun until the arrival of the IV. Corps.

In the event of the force covering Spincourt (18th Battalion of Chasseurs à pied) being compelled to withdraw before the arrival of this force, it will retire on the detachment about Azannes to co-operate with it in holding the Côtes de Romagne.

4. From the moment the units of the IV. Corps arrive near Azannes, the Hauts de Meuse to Damvillers (inclusive) will come into the zone of operations of the Third Army.

The limit of the zones of operations of the Third and Fifth Armies may, in addition, be modified before the date (12th day of mobilization) when the main body of the Fifth Army reaches the Meuse, in accordance with the situation which may arise out of the events of the first days of the campaign in the northern part of the theatre of war.

*Note.*—The field works to be constructed in order to organize the defences that are required will be studied in peace time. As regards the positions north-east and south-east of Montmédy, the projects have been undertaken by the II. Corps; as regards those along the Hauts de Meuse, from Ornes to Damvillers, by the VI. Corps. The projects will be sent to the IV. Corps.

### Fourth Army

Three corps (XII., XVII. and Colonial). 9th Cavalry Division.
Heavy artillery: three batteries of 155 C.T.R. of the 2nd Regiment.
Headquarters: St. Dizier.

*General idea.*

This Army will at first be temporarily in second line and ready to move on the . . . day of mobilization, with the object either of advancing into the southern Woëvre, between the Second and Third Armies, to co-operate ultimately in the operations of the Second Army, or of moving northwards west of the Meuse, to the left of the Third Army, in the direction of Arlon.

### Fifth Army

Five corps (I., II., III., X., XI.). One cavalry division.
Heavy artillery: one regiment (six batteries of 120 L., seven

batteries of 155 C.T.R.), one group of four batteries of 120 L. (of the 4th Regiment).

Two Reserve divisions.

Headquarters : Rethel.

*Zone of operations.*

From the Argonne Forest to a line Vervins—Hirson.

Headquarters : XI. Corps at Ville sur Tourbe.
,, X. Corps at Vouziers.
,, III. Corps at Amagne.
,, I. Corps at Aubenton.
,, II. Corps : covering force at Stenay.
,, Group of Reserve divisions, 53rd at Neufchâteau, 69th at Sissonne, 51st at Vervins.

The northern boundary of the zone of operations of the Fifth Army will vary according to circumstances, and cannot be laid down beforehand.

*General idea.*

This Army is to operate against the right wing of the enemy forces. The theatre of operations may be limited, to begin with, to the territories of the two belligerents ; or it may extend at once into neutral territory (Luxembourg and in particular Belgium).

In the first case it will operate northwards at once, the Third Army advancing from the Hauts de Meuse and the Montmédy bridgehead. It will deploy in the general direction of Thionville and Luxembourg, endeavouring to drive northwards any enemy forces in front of it. It should hold a part of its force in reserve behind its left wing to protect itself against any enveloping movement the enemy may attempt by violating Belgian territory, in the immediate proximity of the frontier. It will also be prepared for a strong offensive against Thionville with its Active corps, or for the investment of that place with the Reserve divisions at its disposal.

The Cavalry Corps, concentrated at first south-east of Mézières, will march on Montmédy to support the II. Corps and afterwards to co-operate in the action of the left of the Fifth Army.

In the alternative case, that of the enemy violation of neutral territory, the Fifth Army will move north-eastwards for an advance into Belgian Luxembourg by way of the Neufchâteau and Florenville districts, echeloned on its left, as before, for flank protection. This movement will however be carried out only by order of the commander-in-chief.

In this case, the Fourth Army, moving northwards by the left bank of the Meuse, will take up a position on the right of the Fifth Army and move between it and the Third Army in the direction of Arlon.

The Cavalry Corps will form the left of this mass of manœuvre.

Consequently the Fifth Army should at first be so disposed in depth that it can march either east or north-east and cross the line of the Meuse on the . . . day of mobilization.

Whatever the circumstances, it will be responsible for the protection of the Hauts de Meuse, north of Verdun (sector Azannes —Damvillers), and the bridge-head of Montmédy and will employ its Reserve divisions for this purpose.

### 1st Group of Reserve Divisions
### (58th, 63rd, 66th Reserve Divisions)

Headquarters : Vesoul.

*General idea.*

(1) To deploy facing east in the event of a violation of Swiss territory.

(2) To move north-eastwards as a support to or eventually as part of the First Army, with the principal object of covering the right of the operations of that Army, and assisting in the investment of Neuf Brissach and Strasbourg.

### 4th Group of Reserve Divisions
### (51st, 53rd and 69th Reserve Divisions)

Headquarters : Sissonne.

*General idea.*

To deploy either facing east or south-east, or else facing north-east as support to the Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies, or as part of the mass of manœuvre of the left wing.[1]

### Cavalry Corps
### 1st, 3rd and 5th Cavalry Divisions

Headquarters : Charleville, Aubenton, Poix Terron.

*General idea.*

The corps will be at the disposal of the commander-in-chief, who is responsible for the initial covering arrangements.

In the event of the commander of the Cavalry Corps ascertaining that the enemy has crossed the Franco-German frontier in the northern Woëvre sector, or that the neutrality of Belgium or of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg has been violated, he will immediately assemble his three cavalry divisions east of Mézières.

He will hold them in readiness either, in the first case, to march on Montmédy to support the II. Corps or, in the second case, to advance into Belgium.

The movement will only be carried out by order of the commander-in-chief ; but in either case no unit must enter neutral territory before receiving the express authority of the commander-in-chief.

In the second eventuality, such dispositions will have to be made as will enable the Cavalry Corps to advance at once, on receipt of the order, to meet the enemy's columns, more especially those moving through Belgian Luxembourg, south of the difficult country Houffalize—Saint Hubert. Its mission will be to reconnoitre these columns and delay their advance. It may employ all or a part of the 145th Infantry Regiment as a support.

The 148th Infantry Regiment, which will also come under its orders, will move as rapidly as possible on Dinant, to occupy the Meuse bridges between the fortress of Namur and the frontier, in the event of the Belgian Government not having already arranged for this.

[1] No zone of operations was indicated for this group, but on the map its billeting area was marked in rear of the Fifth Army, from Bourgogne (inclusive) to Vervins (inclusive) with Sissonne as headquarters.

Copy No. 10.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 5

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC., Commanding British Expeditionary Force.

General Headquarters,
20th August 1914.

1. Information regarding the enemy and allied troops will be communicated separately.
2. The British Army will move north of the River Sambre in accordance with the attached march table.
3. The Cavalry Division and 5th Cavalry Brigade will cover the movement, occupying approximately the positions indicated in the march table, the 5th Cavalry Brigade acting under the orders of the G.O.C. Cavalry Division.
4. The R.F.C. will act in accordance with special instructions.
5. Army Troops are allotted in accordance with the table attached.
6. Positions of H.Q. of Divisions and 5th Cavalry Brigade will be reported to G.H.Q. as soon as decided.
7. Rendezvous for Supply Columns on August 21st will be as under :

*Friday, August 21st, 6 A.M.* :

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cavalry Division and 5th Cavalry Brigade | Douzies. | |
| First Army. . . . | Boue | |
| Second Army . . . | Landrecies. | Supply columns to be west of the meridian of Landrecies by 6 A.M. |
| Army Troops, G.H.Q. | Landrecies. | |

*Saturday, 22nd August, 7 A.M.* :

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cavalry Division and 5th Cavalry Brigade | Blanc Misseron. | Railway station on French side of Belgian Frontier between Valenciennes and Mons. |
| First Army. . . . | Landrecies. | |
| Second Army . . . | Onnaing. | 4½ miles N.E. of Valenciennes. |
| Army Troops, G.H.Q. | Landrecies. | |

8. G.H.Q. and Army Troops attached will remain at Le Cateau, to which reports will be sent.

Issued at 1 P.M.

A. J. MURRAY,
Lieutenant-General,
C.G.S.

## Table of Moves for 21st August 1914

| Formation. | Movement. | Roads allotted. | Outposts. | Remarks. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cav. Div. . | H.Q. to Givry.<br>To area St. Symphorien—Harveng—Vieux Reng—Grand Reng—Faurœulx. (E. of 3rd Div.) | The Solre le Chateau—Maubeuge—Mons road and all roads E. of it. | Merbes le Chateau inclusive — Binche—Villers St. Ghislain—Mons exclusive.<br>All under G.O.C. Cav. Div. | Maubeuge to be clear by 9 A.M. The Maubeuge — Mons road as far as Bonnet to be clear by 12 noon.<br>*Note.*—Binche may be occupied by Belgian troops. |
| 5th Cav. Bde. | To neighbourhood of Binche, march to be arranged by G.O.C. Cav. Div. | | | |
| II. Corps . . | H.Q. to Bavai.<br>Heads of Divisions to line Gognies—Bavai. Tails to be clear of line Avesnes — Marbaix — Maroilles — Landrecies by 11 A.M. | The La Capelle—Avesnes — Mons road and all roads W. of it. | Local protection. | |
| I. Corps . . | H.Q. to Marbaix.<br>Heads of Divisions to the line Avesnes—Marbaix—Maroilles—Landrecies all inclusive. | do. | do. | |

## Table of Moves for 22nd August 1914

| Formation. | Movement. | Roads allotted. | Outposts. | Remarks. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cav. Div. | H.Q. to Jurbise.<br>To area Lens—Herchies—Erbisœul—Les Bruyères—Masnuy St. Pierre. | E. of the road Givry — Mons exclusive. | On the line Binche—Rœulx—Lens. | |
| 5th Cav. Bde. | At Binche. | Any available between Binche and Rœulx. | | |
| II. Corps | H.Q. Bavai.<br>Heads of Divisions to the line Mons (exclus.)—Thulin (9 m. W. of Mons).<br>Tails to be clear of Hautmont—Hargnies by 11 A.M. | The Avesnes—Mons road and all roads W. of it. | Local protection. | |
| I. Corps | H.Q. Marbaix.<br>Heads of Divisions to line Hautmont — Hargnies both inclus. | do. | | |

## Table of Moves for 23rd August 1914, to be completed by 4 p.m.

| Formation. | Movement. | Roads allotted. | Outposts. | Remarks. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cav. Div. | No move. | | Line Thieusies exclusive—Lens. The outposts from Binche exclusive—Thieusies will be withdrawn in evening when relieved by infantry. | |
| 5th Cav. Bde. | No move. | | Local protection. Connect with outposts of 1st Div. | |
| 2nd Corps | H.Q. to Genly. | | | |
| 3rd Div. | To area St. Denis—Mons exclusive—Noirchin—Asquillies—Spiennes—St. Symphorien — Havré. (Prepared to move N.E. of E.) | | Line Maurage (inclusive) — Thieu—Gottignies—Thieusies (inclusive). Connect with 1st Corps on right and Cav. Div. on left. | To be N. of the line Blaregnies — Bougnies — Villers St. Ghislain by 11 A.M. *Note.*—Mons is probably occupied by Belgian troops. |
| 5th Div. | To area Nimy — Ghlin — Baudour — St. Ghislain — Boussu. (Prepared to move E.) | | Local protection and watching roads leading N. and N.E. | |
| 1st Corps | H.Q. to La Longueville. | | | |
| 1st Div. | Head to Estinne au Mont, tail to Mairieux. | All roads S. of line Bougnies — Villers St. Ghislain, which will be cleared by 3rd Div. by 11 A.M. | Line Vellereille les Brayeux—Maurage (exclusive), connect with French troops on right and with 2nd Army on left. | |
| 2nd Div. | Head to Harmignies, tail to La Longueville. | | | |

*Allotment of Army Troops.*

Army Troops will be attached as follows :—

| | Formation to which attached. | Remarks. |
|---|---|---|
| G.H.Q. 1st and 2nd Echelon.<br>G.H.Q. Signal Co.; H.Q. and Sections A, B, C, F, N, H, J, Q.<br>A Squadron, North Irish Horse.<br>A.T. Inf. Bn. (1/Cam. Highlanders) less 2 Companies.<br>A.T. Train H.Q.<br>Printing Co. L. of C., No. 1 Section.<br>No. 20 Field Ambulance. | G.H.Q.* | *Will receive from Staff Officer for A.T. through Camp Commandant, G.H.Q. |
| I. Army H.Q.<br>I. Army H.Q. Signal Co. & Sections K, L, G, D.<br>Printing Co. L. of C., No. 2 Section.<br>B Squadron, South Irish Horse.<br>1 Co. A.T. Inf. Bn. (1/Cam. Highrs.).<br>No. 1 Bridging Train.<br>No. 19 Field Ambulance, B and C Sections. | I. Army Corps. | |
| II. Army H.Q.<br>II. Army H.Q. Signal Co.; H.Q. and Sections E, M, O, P.<br>C Squadron, North Irish Horse.<br>1 Co. A.T. Inf. Bn. (1/Cam. Highrs.).<br>No. 2 Bridging Train.<br>No. 19 Field Ambulance, A Section. | II. Army Corps. | |

The 5th Cav. Bde. and R.F.C. will receive orders direct from G.H.Q. similarly to Armies and the Cavalry Division.

*Secret.* Copy No. 6.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 6

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commanding British Expeditionary Force.

G.H.Q.,
21.8.14.

1. Two hostile Cavalry columns are reported moving S. and S.W. from the neighbourhood of Nivelles and patrols have been reported as having reached the line Grammont — Ath — St. Ghislain (6 miles W. of Mons)—Mons—La Louvière (10 miles E. of Mons)—Charleroi.

   A column of all arms was reported moving on Mons from Brussels and its head may have reached the neighbourhood of Braine le Comte this evening. The French have been in contact with the enemy's infantry on the line Pont à Celles (7 miles N.N.W. of Charleroi)—Tamines (7 miles E. of Charleroi).

2. The movements of 1st and 2nd Corps and 5th Cav. Bde. ordered for to-morrow in Operation Order No. 5 of 20th instant will hold good except as regards outposts (see para. 5 below).

3. The Cav. Div. will remain in their present position until the outposts of the 2nd Corps are in position. They will then move to the area Thulin — Quiévrain — Baisieux — Audregnies —Élouges (on the left of 5th Div.). G.O.C. 2nd Corps will send a Staff Officer to Cav. Div. to lead the division across the billeting area of the corps.

   Cav. Div. H.Q. to Quiévrain.

4. Further orders will be issued to 5th Cav. Bde. during to-morrow morning.

5. *Outposts.*

   2nd Corps. The line Givry inclus.— Harmignies — Bois la Haut all by 12 noon—Nimy and the line of the canal westward, as far as bridge S. of OE in Pommerœul inclus. not later than 1 P.M.

   Cav. Div. from left of 2nd Corps along line of canal to Condé sur Escaut.

6. Reports to Le Cateau.

G. M. HARPER, Colonel, G.S.
for C.G.S.

Issued at 11.55 P.M.

# CAVALRY DIVISION

O (A) 47 21st.

(1) The information which you have acquired and conveyed to the C.-in-C. appears to be somewhat exaggerated. It is probable that only mounted troops, perhaps supported by Jäger battalions, are in your immediate neighbourhood.

(2) In no circumstances, however, does the C.-in-C. wish the Cavalry Division to be seriously engaged until he is ready to support it.

(3) You will therefore move to-morrow to a position on the left of the 2nd Corps, viz. :—to the area Thulin—Quiévrain—Baisieux—Audregnies—Élouges. This movement will be carried out after the infantry outposts of the 2nd Corps have occupied the line Givry—Mons—canal bridge N. of Nimy (Mons) and the line of the canal westward, to north of Thulin. The G.O.C. 2nd Corps will send a Staff Officer to arrange as to time and route. Orders will be issued to this effect to 2nd Corps.

(4) The movements of the 1st and 2nd Corps will otherwise be as indicated in Operation Order No. 5 of 20th instant.

(5) The 5th Cavalry Brigade will remain at Binche, taking measures for its own protection. If seriously attacked the brigade will fall back on Givry ; further orders will be issued to this brigade during the morning.

(6) Cav. Div. H.Q. will move to Quiévrain.

HENRY WILSON, Major-General,
Sub-Chief of the Staff,
G.H.Q. Exped. Force.

21/8/14.
11.35 P.M.

Copy No.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 7

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commander-in-Chief, British Ex. Force.

Bavai,
24 Aug. 1914.

1. The Army will move to-morrow, 25th inst., to a position in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, exact positions will be pointed out on the ground to-morrow.

2. Corps will march so that their rear guards are clear of the Maubeuge —Bavai—Eth road by 5.30 A.M.

3. Roads available :

   *1st Corps* (with 5th Cavalry Brigade attached). All roads east of, but excluding, Bavai—Montay road.

   *2nd Corps.* Bavai—Montay road (inclusive), up to but excluding the road Wargnies—Villers Pol—Ruesnes—Capelle sur Ecaillon—Vertain—Romerie—Solesmes.

   *Cavalry Division*, with *19th Infantry Brigade* attached, the last-named road inclusive and all roads to the westward.

4. Two brigades of the Cavalry Division with Divisional Cavalry of the 2nd Corps, under command of a brigadier to be named by G.O.C. Cavalry Division, will cover the movement of the 2nd Corps.

   The remainder of the Cavalry Division with the 19th Inf. Brigade, under command of the G.O.C. Cavalry Division, will cover the west flank.

5. Reports to H.Q. Bavai up to 5 A.M., then to H.Q. Le Cateau.

6. A Staff Officer from Corps and Cavalry Division will report to G.H.Q. Le Cateau at 5 A.M. to receive orders as to positions.

Issued at
8.25 P.M.

A. J. MURRAY,
Major-General,
C.G.S. for
F.M. C.-in-C.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 8

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
Commanding British Expeditionary Force.

G.H.Q.
25/8/1914.

1. The enemy followed our movement this morning and is also passing troops of all arms to the West and South.

2. It is the intention of the C.-in-C. to continue the retirement to-morrow with a view to covering his advanced base and protect his L. of C.

3. For this movement the 19th Brigade will be taken from the Cavalry Division and placed under the orders of the II. Army.

4. The retirement will be carried out from left to right.

5. The 4th Div. will fall back on the western flank in the general direction of Péronne, the western column moving along the line indicated roughly by the line Seranvillers—Le Catelet.

The movement to commence at 7 A.M.

The billeting area for to-morrow night being around Le Catelet—Beaurevoir.

Boundary roads for this force being :

*On the East.*

Fontaine — Ligny — Caullery — Elincourt — Serain — Beaurevoir inclus.

*On the West.*

Such roads as the G.O.C. 4th Div. wishes to use.

The II. Corps, with the 19th Bde., will move in echelon and fall back in the general direction of Beaurevoir — Prémont — La Sablière.

Boundary roads for this force :

*On the West.*

Fontaine — Ligny — Caullery — Elincourt — Serain — Beaurevoir exclus.

*On the East.*

All roads between the above and the Le Cateau—Busigny road exclusive.

The billeting area for to-morrow night being from Beaurevoir (exclus.) to La Sablière.

7. The I. Corps will start at 5.30 A.M. and march to the area of Busigny, and connect with the II. Corps at La Sablière.

The I. Corps can use the Le Cateau—Busigny road and roads to the East.

Billeting area in Busigny and to the N. and E.

8. The Cav. Div., with the 5th Cav. Bde. attached, will cover the movement on the N. and W. and will arrange their billets outside those already allotted.

9. G.H.Q. to St. Quentin at 7 P.M. to-night.

A. J. MURRAY,
Lieut.-General,
C.G.S.

Issued at ½ P.M.[1]

[1] The II. Corps War Diary states that G.H.Q. Operation Order 8 was received about 9 P.M. Two copies of the order were preserved as appendices to this diary; of these one bears no time of issue, and the other is marked "Issued at ½ P.M." like the G.H.Q. copy, and also the I. Corps copy.

The 4th Division copy of the order is marked "Issued at 7.30 P.M." This is no doubt the correct time. That the time was later than 3.45 P.M. is proved by the following autograph letter from the Sub-Chief of the General Staff to Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien preserved in the G.H.Q. G.S. War Diary:

25th/8/14
3.45 P.M.

Dear Sir Horace,

The C.-in-C. has decided to continue the retirement to-morrow, the left (probably the 4th Division) being directed towards Péronne.

He told me to let you have this private note of his intention.

Orders will follow as soon as the details can be worked out.

V. S. YRS.

HENRY WILSON.

Copy No. 6.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 1

BY

## MAJOR-GENERAL T. D. O. SNOW, C.B.,
## Comdg. 4 Div.

Aug. 25.
Cambrai Sheet. Pt. 129.

1. 1st and 2nd Corps are taking up a position approximately on the line Avesnes—Le Cateau—Caudry (incl.). Third Div. on the left.

2. The Fourth Division will take up a position Caudry (excl.)—Fontaine au Pire—Wambaix—knoll just West of Seranvillers, and will commence entrenching as soon as it is light to-morrow.

3. Disposition of units will be :

(*a*) *11th Brigade* Caudry (excl.) to station on railway between Fontaine au Pire—Wambaix (incl.). *Tempy. H.Q.* Carrières, just south of Fontaine au Pire. *Route* from present position Briastre—Viesly—Bethencourt—Beauvois.

(*b*) *12th Brigade* station on railway between Fontaine au Pire and Wambaix (excl.) to knoll West of Seranvillers. *Tempy. H.Q.* Longsart. *Route* from present position Bethencourt—Cattenières—Wambaix. The ½ Bn. R. Innis. Fus. must remain in position until the Tenth Brig. has passed through Beauvois. It may withdraw its detachment from Bevillers to Beauvois.

(*c*) *10th Brig.* Haucourt (in reserve). *Route*—any route west of Caudry.

*Order of March of Inf. Brigs. :*
12th Brig., 11th Brig., 10th Brig.

(*d*) *Irish Horse* Haucourt.

(*e*) *Div. H.Q.* Haucourt.

(*f*) *Div. Arty.* (less 32 Bde.) Ligny en Cambrésis.

*Tempy. H.Q.* The Mairie at Ligny en Cambrésis.

(*g*) *Fd. Ambces.* (on arrival) one at Ligny en Cambrésis, one at Mn. d'Haucourt.

4 Outposts will be found by 11th and 12th Brigades:
*11th Brig.* Caudry (excl.) to the line Estournel—Longsart.
*12th Brig.* from the line Estournel—Longsart to Masnières.

5. Refilling point will be notified later.

6. Sick will be taken back with units in impressed wagons and will be handed over to the Fd. Ambces. when they arrive.

7. Meeting place for the 2nd Line Transport:
*10th Brig.* East exit of Haucourt.
*11th Brig.* Railway Bridge on road Fontaine au Pire—Ligny en Cambrésis road.
*12th Brig.* North exit of Esnes.
*Arty.* Stand fast at Ligny en Cambrésis.

8. All First Line vehicles not required can be sent back at once to the position given in para. 3.

9. Troops will *not* move from their present position to those mentioned in para. 3 until they receive further orders, but reconnaissances will be made with a view to carrying it out in the dark.

J. E. EDMONDS,
Colonel,
Issued at 5 P.M. G.S. 4th Division.

*Note.*—This is the only Divisional Operation Order available for Le Cateau.

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An amendment to this Order, sent out at 6.40 P.M. in consequence of instructions from G.H.Q., reduced the length of front as follows:

11th Infantry Brigade:

"From Fontaine au Pire (inclusive) to railway station, instead of Caudry (exclusive) to railway station."

12th Infantry Brigade:

"From railway line at Station between Fontaine au Pire and Wambaix (exclusive) to Wambaix (inclusive)."

Copy No. 9.

## 2ND CORPS

# OPERATION ORDER No. 6

2nd Corps Headquarters,
Reference Map F.T. 13. 25th August 1914.

1. Information regarding the enemy is that he followed our movements to-day and is also passing troops to South and West.
2. The Army will continue its retirement to-morrow.
3. The 19th Infantry Brigade is placed under the orders of G.O.C. 2nd Corps.
4. Order of Columns from East to West :
   1st Corps.
   2nd Corps (and 19th Infantry Brigade).
   4th Division.
   The Cavalry Division, with 5th Cavalry Brigade, will cover the movement on the North and West.
5. The 2nd Corps and 19th Infantry Brigade will march to the billeting area Beaurevoir (exclusive)—La Sablière.
6. Roads allotted to 2nd Corps :
   (*a*) 5th Division and 19th Infantry Brigade (under command of G.O.C. 5th Division) : the Le Cateau—Maretz—Estrées road, and the Troisville—Reumont road leading to it.
   (*b*) To 3rd Division :
   the Audencourt—Montigny—Elincourt—Malincourt (West of the Church)—Beaurevoir road.
   (*c*) Corps Headquarters and Corps Troops will march by the 5th Division road.
7. Each Division will detail a rear guard of one Infantry Brigade, two Brigades R.F.A., and the Cyclist Companies and Divisional Squadrons.
8. (*a*) All impedimenta (moving by Divisional roads) will start at 4 A.M. using divisional roads.
   (*b*) Main bodies will start at 7 A.M.
   (*c*) Corps Headquarters and Corps Troops will join the 5th Divisional Column one mile South-West of where the road crosses the railway.
9. Railhead to-morrow will be Péronne.
10. (*a*) Rendezvous for Supply Columns, S. Quentin 2 A.M.
    (*b*) Rendezvous for Ammunition Park, Maretz at 5 A.M.
11. Report to Bertry until 10 A.M., and after that hour to cross-roads half mile South-East of Serain.

G. F. WALKER,
Brigadier-General, General Staff,
2nd Corps.

Issued at 10.15 P.M.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 9

Issued at 8 P.M. Noyon.

27.8.14.

O (*a*) 326.

Eventually took the form of a message to

Cavalry Division ;
I. Corps ;
II. Corps.

Copies of the messages are p.a. in above files in O (*a*).

*Note.*—Message concluded with an order to throw away unnecessary impedimenta and ammunition not absolutely required and carry exhausted men on vehicles.

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The above is the record in the G.H.Q. Files. Copies of the messages to the Cavalry Division and I. Corps cannot be found ; that sent to the latter was in cipher. The original order, given below, was, however, received by the II. Corps.

## OPERATION ORDER No. 9

BY

FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.

G.H.Q.,
27/8/14.

1. It is reported on good authority that German Forces are in or near St. Quentin.

2. The 3rd and 5th Divisions and 19th Bde. will clear Ham and the other canal bridges by daylight, and will then march on Noyon and cross to the left bank of the R. Oise.

3. The 4th Division, under orders of II. Corps, will move to ground north of the bridges at Ham, starting immediately on receipt of order.

4. The I. Corps has been ordered to Pierremande (8 miles S.W. of La Fère), passing the R. Oise at La Fère, starting as soon after receipt of this order as possible.

5. The Cav. Div. now under orders of the C.-in-C. will cover the retirement of the II. Corps and 4th Division.

6. All ammunition on wagons not absolutely required and other impedimenta will be unloaded and officers and men carried to the full capacity of all transport, both horse and mechanical.

7. G.H.Q. will move to Compiègne at Y (*sic*) A.M. to-morrow.

H. WILSON, Major-Genl.,
Sub-Chief of Staff.

Issued at 8.30 P.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 6.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 10

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commanding British Expeditionary Force.

G.H.Q.,
28th August 1914.

1. (*a*) The enemy advanced to within 6 miles of St. Quentin last night and appears to have taken up a flank position with 1 corps a few miles north of St. Quentin to-day, to cover a general movement to the westward of a considerable portion of his 1st Army, with a view to checking the advance of French troops from the west, some of whom have been successfully engaged with him last night and during to-day.

(*b*) The approximate position of our troops is as follows :

*Cavalry Division :*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Brigade and 4th Brigade . . . . | Cressy. |
| 3rd Brigade . . . . . | Jussy. |
| 5th Brigade . . . . . | covering I. Corps. |
| 2nd Brigade . . . . . | not reported. |
| H.Q. . . . . | Moyencourt. |

*I. Corps.* Area Charmes (1 mile S.E. of La Fère)—Amigny—Barrisis. H.Q. St. Gobain (6 miles S.E. of La Fère).

*II. Corps* (including 4th Division and 19th Brigade). Area Noyon—Carlepont—Cuts. H.Q. Cuts.

*R.F.C.* Vicinity of Compiègne.

2. It is the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief's intention that the Army should halt to-morrow to rest, but all formations must be south of the line Vendeuil (4 miles N. of La Fère)—Jussy—Ham—Nesle, and will take steps for local protection.

3. The 4th Division and 19th Infantry Brigade will remain for the present under the orders of the G.O.C. II. Corps. The 5th Cavalry Brigade will remain under the orders of the G.O.C. I. Corps.

G.O.'s C. Corps and Cavalry Division will report the position of their formations to G.H.Q. to-morrow at 12 midday.

4. Railheads for Supplies, August 29th:

| | |
|---|---|
| I. Corps | Attichy. |
| Cavalry Division | Lamotte Breuil. |
| 5th Cav. Bde. | do. |
| II. Corps | Compiègne. |
| 4th Division | do. |
| 19th Brigade | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| Flying Corps | do. |
| L. of C. Units | do. |

Railheads will be regarded as the rendezvous, and formations will consequently be responsible for conducting the supply columns to and from the railheads.

5. Reports to G.H.Q. Compiègne.

Issued at 11.30 P.M.

A. J. MURRAY, Lieut.-General,
C.S.O.

[*Note.*—The draft copy of this Order (Copy No. I.) is endorsed in pencil "Despatched 5 A.M. 29.8.14."]

*Secret.* Copy No. 6.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 11

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force.

G.H.Q.
29th August 1914.

1. Information as to the enemy has been communicated personally to G.O.'s C. Corps and Cavalry Division.

2. The Army will retire to a line Soissons—Rethondes to-morrow.

The Corps Commanders will arrange the hours of starting.

The 5th Cavalry Brigade will remain attached to the 1st Corps.

The 2nd Cavalry Brigade will come under the orders of the 2nd Corps. The 4th Division and 19th Inf. Bde. will remain under the orders of the 2nd Corps.

The Cavalry Division, less 2 cavalry brigades, will cover the left of the retirement moving on Compiègne.

Corps Commanders will as far as possible destroy all bridges as they retire, taking care that the cavalry is not cut off.

The dividing line between the two Corps will be St. Paul—Selens—Nouvron—Fontenoy, the roads passing through these places being assigned to the 1st Corps.

3. Railheads for 30th August 1914.

| *Formation.* | *Railhead and Rendezvous.* |
|---|---|
| 1st Corps | Béthisy St. Pierre. |
| Cavalry Division | Verberie. |
| 5th Cavalry Brigade | Verberie. |
| 2nd Corps | Pont Ste. Maxence. |
| 4th Division | do. |
| 19th Brigade | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| Flying Corps | do. |
| L. of C. Units | do. |

Railheads will be regarded as the rendezvous, and formations will consequently be responsible for conducting the supply columns to and from the railheads.

4. Reports to G.H.Q. at Villers Cottérêts after 10 A.M. 30/8/14, up to that hour to Compiègne.

A. J. MURRAY, Lt.-Genl.,
C.G.S.

Issued at 9 P.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 6.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 12

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force.

G.H.Q. 30/8/14.

1. Yesterday the 2nd Corps was attacked south of Ham by the VII. German Corps which had advanced from St. Quentin that morning, but which met with but little success. The pressure, such as it was, was relieved by a French advance in force on our right which met with great success in the neighbourhood of Guise, where the German Guard and X. Corps were driven back into the Oise. On our left French forces were engaged with the enemy in the direction of Péronne, but the action was not pressed by the Germans, who had slightly withdrawn during the early hours of the afternoon.

2. The Army will move west to-morrow in accordance with the attached table.[1]

Corps Commanders will fix the hour of starting which will be communicated to G.H.Q. as soon as decided.

3. The 4th Division and 19th Infantry Brigade will become the 3rd Corps and will pass under the command of Lieut.-Gen. W. P. Pulteney, C.B., D.S.O., at a date and hour to be arranged by G.O.'s C. the 2nd and 3rd Corps.

The 3rd Corps will be the northern column.

The Cavalry Division will cover the northern flank of the movement, marching down the right bank of the R. Oise.

4. Railheads :

| *Formation.* | *Railhead and Rendezvous.* |
|---|---|
| 1st Corps | Plessis Belleville. |
| 5th Cav. Bde. | do. |
| 2nd Corps | do. |
| 3rd Corps | Senlis. |
| Cav. Div. | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| Flying Corps | do. |
| L. of C. Units | do. |

[1] Marginal note in pencil : "Order changed later and Army moved south. H. Wake, G.S."

Railheads will be regarded as the rendezvous, and formations will consequently be responsible for conducting the Supply Columns to and from the railheads.

This order will remain in force until cancelled.

5. Reports to Dammartin en Goële at 6 A.M., 12 miles S.E. of Senlis and 15 miles S.W. from Crépy.

A. J. Murray, Lt.-Gen., C.G.S.

Issued at 5.15 P.M.

[*Note.*—The Cavalry Division and I. and II. Corps copies of this order are endorsed "issued at 6.15 P.M."]

MARCH TABLE FOR 31ST AUGUST

| Formation. | Roads Allotted. | Billeting Area. | Remarks. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cav. Div. . . | To cross R. Oise at Port de la Croix St. Ouen. | Rivecourt — Bazicourt—Sarron. | |
| 4th Div. 19th Bde. | To be allotted by II. Corps Commander. | Verberie—Pontpoint — Saintines — St. Sauveur. | These formations will form III. Corps. |
| II. Corps . . | The road Mortefontaine—Taillefontaine — Eméville —Feigneux—Duvy inclusive and all roads N. and W. of it. | Morienval — Béthisy —Néry — Crépy — Feigneux — Fresnoy. | |
| I. Corps and 5th Cav. Bde. | Roads S. of that allotted to II. Corps. Bulk of force to move by Soissons—Villers Cottérêts—Nanteuil road. | Soucy—Haramont—Vez—Vaumoise—Villers Cottérêts —Puiseux. | |

*Secret.*

# OPERATION ORDER No. 13

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
Commanding British Expeditionary Force.

G.H.Q. 31/8/14.

1. The enemy appears to have completed his westerly movement and was to-day pivoting round to the south, large columns having been observed advancing in a general southerly or south-easterly direction on the front Noyon—Compiègne from about Roye—Montdidier. This advance is covered by at least two Cavalry Divisions who reached the Oise this afternoon.

2. The Army will move to-morrow in accordance with the attached table.

3. The 4th Div. and 19th Infantry Brigade will constitute the 3rd Corps under the command of Lieut.-General W. P. Pulteney, C.B., D.S.O.

4. The Cav. Div. will continue to cover the 3rd Corps.

5. The 3rd Cav. Bde. will come under the orders of I. Corps.

6. Railheads and Rendezvous :

| *Formation.* | *Railheads.* | *Rendezvous.* |
|---|---|---|
| 1st Corps | Plessis Belleville. | Betz. |
| 2nd Corps | do. | do. |
| 5th Cav. Bde. | do. | do. |
| Cav. Div. | St. Mard (near Dammartin). | |
| 3rd Corps | do. | |
| Flying Corps | do. | |
| G.H.Q. | do. | |
| L. of C. Units | do. | |

7. Reports to Dammartin en Goële.

A. J. MURRAY, Lieut.-General,
C.G.S.

Issued at 8.50 P.M.

## MARCH TABLE FOR 1st SEPTEMBER

| Formation. | Billeting Area, Aug. 31/Sept. 1. | Roads Allotted. | Billeting Area, Sept. 1st/2nd. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st Corps H.Q. Villers Cottérêts | Vauxbuin—Pernant—Soucy—Verte Feuille. | Vauxbuin—Villers Cottérêts—La Ferté Milon—Mareuil (inc.) on east.<br>Vivières—Villers Cottérêts—Boursonne—Antilly (inc.) on west. | La Ferté Milon—Ivors—Betz—Mareuil. |
| 2nd Corps H.Q. Crépy. | Coyolles—Crépy—Lévignen. | Vaumoise—Lévignen—Fresnoy—Villers St. Genest (inc.) on east.<br>Duvy—Ormoy—Nanteuil (inc.) on west. | Villers St. Genest—Nanteuil—Silly—Brégy—Bouillancy. |
| 3rd Corps . . | St. Jean aux Bois—St. Sauveur. | Gilocourt—Crépy—Auger St. Vincent—Rozières—Bois du Val (inc.) on east.<br>Verberie—Raray—Rully—Baron (inc.) on west. | Bois du Val—Baron—Montagny. |
| Cav. Div. H.Q. Plessis Villette. | South bank of Oise. | Roads west of Verberie—Rully—Baron (exclus.). | Montépilloy—Mont l'Evêque. |

# TELEGRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS

BETWEEN

## EARL KITCHENER AND FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH

30 Aug.–1 Sept. 1914.

(Nos. 1 to 3 are introductory.)

(1)

From Inspector-General of Communications, Rouen.
To War Office.

No. Q. 590.

29th August 1914.

From news received from the General Headquarters, I am moving the whole of the stores and personnel of Nos. 1 and 2 Bases to the mouth of the Loire and Le Mans, which I am making base and advanced bases provisionally until their suitability for permanent use is established.

(2)

From War Office to Inspector-General of Communications, Rouen.

No. 738, cipher.

30th August 1914.

No. 884 Q.M.G. A demand has been received by the Admiralty for conveyance from R. for 2,000 men, 500 officers, 150 horses, 6,000 tons of stores, 56 wagons to St. Nazaire and 6,000 men from Port C. We have ordered them to comply, but will you please explain ?

(3)

From Inspector-General of Communications, Rouen.
To War Office.

No. G.W. 137.

30th August 1914.

Your No. 738.[1] It would appear that the information on which I based the action conveyed in my No. Q. 590 [2] has not reached you.

[1] See No. (2). [2] See No. (1).

Information has reached me from General Headquarters of the Expeditionary Force that the Commander-in-Chief has decided to make a prolonged and definite retreat due south, passing to the west or east of Paris. Further retention of Rouen and Havre is obviously impossible as the enemy has been reported near Amiens.

The postal authorities should be warned.

(4)

From Earl Kitchener to Field-Marshal Sir J. French.

No. 748, cipher.

30th August 1914.

The Inspector-General of Communications has sent the following telegram to-day at 10.15 A.M.

" I have been informed from General Headquarters of the " Expeditionary Force that it has been decided by the Commander- " in-Chief to make a definite and prolonged retreat due south, " passing by Paris to the east or west. As the enemy are reported " to be near Amiens, it is obviously impossible further to retain " Havre and Rouen. Will you warn the postal authorities ? "

I understood you would open a new base at St. Nazaire, but what is the meaning of the above ?

(5)

From Field-Marshal Sir J. French to Earl Kitchener.

No. F. 54.

31st August 1914.

I have received your telegrams Nos. 740 and 748.[1] With reference to my telegram No. F. 53, the French Army advanced yesterday from the line of the Oise river, with the result that the left of the advance fully held its own with the Germans and the right won a great success. It appears that three German corps, the 10th, the Guards and a reserve corps, moved from the direction of Le Cateau south, in order to attack in the neighbourhood of Guise the right of the 5th French Army. The French drove them back in disorder and with great losses, and I have every reason to believe that the Commander of the 10th German Corps was killed. From the situation to-day on my front I should gather that the pressure on our centre and left has been relieved by this success, although there are still some German troops remaining in front of the 7th French Corps to the south-west of Péronne.

This morning I received an official communication that General Joffre has made a change in his plan of operations and now intends to take up a more backward position. The 5th and 4th French Armies have been ordered to retire on the river Serre, the right of the 4th Army being towards Rethel and the left of the 5th Army resting on La Fère.

The 6th French Army, comprising the 7th Corps, the Cavalry Corps, 4 reserve divisions, and possibly the 6th Corps, have been ordered to fall back to the line Compiègne—Claremont.

General Joffre appeared to me to be anxious that I should keep

[1] See No. (4).

the position which I am now occupying north of the line Compiègne —Soissons. I have let him know plainly that in the present condition of my troops I shall be absolutely unable to remain in the front line, as he has now begun his retirement. I have decided to begin my retirement to-morrow in the morning behind the Seine, in a south-westerly direction west of Paris.

This means marching for some 8 days without fatiguing the troops at a considerable distance from the enemy.

It will be possible for us to commence our reorganization on the road. My base is now in the neighbourhood of La Rochelle, and I am now forming an advanced base at Le Mans. All that we need to refit and to make good our deficiencies can be sent from this latter place up to meet us at points behind the Seine which I select, and which will be quite safe under the outlying forts of Paris. I do not like General Joffre's plan. I should like to have assumed a vigorous offensive at once, and this has been represented to him, but he pleads in reply the present inability of the British Army to go forward as a good reason for retirement and delay. Of course, in view of the vigorous advance of the Russians, he may be right.

With reference to your telegram No. 748, my intentions have been misunderstood by the Inspector-General. I have no idea of making any prolonged and definite retreat. The French have sent me a large number of decorations to distribute among the officers and men of the Expeditionary Force.

(6)

From Earl Kitchener to Field-Marshal Sir J. French.

No. 767, cipher.

31st August 1914.

I am surprised at your decision to retire behind the Seine. Please let me know if you can all your reasons for this move.

What will be the effect of this course upon your relations with the French Army and on the general military situation? Will your retirement leave a gap in the French line or cause them discouragement, of which the Germans might take advantage to carry out their first programme of first crushing the French and then being free to attack Russia?

Thirty-two trains of German troops were yesterday reported moving from the western field to meet the Russians. Have all your requirements been supplied by the Line of Communications and how has your reorganization progressed?

(7)

From Earl Kitchener to Field-Marshal Sir J. French.

No. 772, cipher.

31st August 1914.

Your telegram No. F. 54 submitted to the Cabinet. The Government are exceedingly anxious lest your force, at this stage of the campaign in particular, should, owing to your proposed retirement so far from the line, not be able to co-operate closely with our Allies and render them continuous support. They expect that you will, as far as possible, conform to the plans of General Joffre for the conduct

of the campaign. They are waiting for the answer which you will no doubt send to my telegram of this morning No. 767, and have all possible confidence in your troops and yourself.

(8)

From Field-Marshal Sir J. French to Earl Kitchener.

No. F. 60.

31st August 1914.

Your telegram No. 767 cipher. I have dispatched, by messenger who left early this morning, a letter to you. I have explained in this at length the reasons for the course which I have taken. If the French go on with their present tactics, which are practically to fall back right and left of me, usually without notice, and to abandon all idea of offensive operations, of course, then, the gap in the French line will remain and the consequences must be borne by them.

I can only state that it would be difficult for the force under my command to withstand successfully in its present condition a strong attack from even one German army corps, and in the event of a pause in my retirement I must expect two army corps at least if not three. If owing to Russian pressure the withdrawals of the Germans turn out to be true it will be easy for me to arrest my retirement and to refit north of Paris, but this I cannot do while my rear guard is still engaged, as it was up to last night.

An effective offensive movement now appears to be open to the French, which would probably close the gap by uniting their inward flanks. But as they will not take such an opportunity I do not see why I should be called upon again to run the risk of absolute disaster in order a second time to save them. I do not think that you understand the shattered condition of the Second Army Corps and how it paralyses my power of offence.

If I have time to refit the force in a proper manner when our further reinforcements arrive, it will be a self-contained and efficient army capable of acting with telling effect. With reference to the progress of the reorganization, the French retirements, which I am obliged to flank march, have made my progress quite impossible, although I have been able to obtain for the troops a certain amount of rest.

My supply and lines of communication are both excellent in every way. The difficulty in reorganization is not behind but in front. I think you had better trust me to watch the situation and act according to circumstances.

Your second telegram to-day. If the French armies are not driven south of their present situation, I could engage not to draw back further than a line drawn east and west through Nanteuil. I shall reach this position to-morrow and will endeavour to refit there.

(9)

From Field-Marshal Sir J. French to Earl Kitchener.

No. F. 62.

1st September 1914.

I hope that you understand quite clearly that in its present condition the force under my command is unable to support our

Allies effectively, whatever their position may be. It does not seem to be quite realized how shattered two divisions of my small force are, and how necessary it is even for the remainder to rest and refit. As long as we are in close contact with the enemy it is impossible to make things right. I have no definite idea of General Joffre's general plan ; its general result is the advance of the Germans and the retreat of the Allies.

I feel quite sure that it is unnecessary to tell you that we will advance into the front line to-morrow and do our utmost if you choose to order it, but I am sure that the result of this would be grave disaster to the French troops. I could never hope to extricate them as I extricated them before. We have all been greatly encouraged by your words, and I am deeply grateful for the confidence which you express in me and my troops. If, however, I failed to make our position perfectly clear to you, I should be culpably wanting in my duty.

(10)

From Earl Kitchener to Field-Marshal Sir J. French.

No. 782, cipher.

1st September 1914.

Has a message from the President of the French Republic about your leaving the French line reached you yet ?

The result of this may be serious to the French arms, and we feel that you should call on your troops for an effort. I am coming to see you this morning to talk over the situation, as I find it very difficult to judge. Please send a telegram to the Embassy at Paris immediately, stating where we can most conveniently meet.

# G.H.Q. MESSAGES TO I. CORPS

## 1st September 1914

1st September.

No operation orders—retirement ordered by messages.
H. W. G. S.

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The above is the record in the G.H.Q. file. The messages sent to I. Corps are given below ; similar messages were sent to II. and III. Corps and Cavalry Division.

To) 1st Corps :

O.A. 530. 1st. C. in C. wishes it to be borne in mind that it is of paramount importance that march S.W. should be carried out. Therefore general engagement must not be entered upon if possible to avoid it and all fighting should be rear-guard action covering retirement to billets ordered.

from) G.H.Q. 11.5 A.M.

To) 1st Corps :

O.A. 533. 1st. If further retirement is ordered for to-morrow roads allotted to you La Ferte Milon—Varreddes—Meaux Bridge—Couilly Road to road Betz—Acy en Multien—Vincy—Etrepilly—Barcy—Meaux Station—Villenoy—Esbly Bridge both inclusive. Probably rear of fighting troops will halt on line Dammartin—Etrepilly—Mary.

from) G.H.Q. 1.20 P.M.

To) 1st Corps :

O.A. 539. 1st. Some enemy cavalry are between II. Corps and G.H.Q. Have ordered II. and III. Corps to retire down their respective roads as soon as they can. March south on roads allotted as soon as possible gaining touch with II. Corps. All information points to considerable enemy forces along the whole of our northern front with possibility of night attack. G.H.Q. move Lagny on Marne now.

from) G.H.Q. 7 P.M.

# CORRESPONDENCE

## WITH REGARD TO HALTING ON THE MARNE AND THE RETREAT BEHIND THE SEINE[1]

### I.

General Joffre to Fd.-Marshal Sir J. French.

G.Q.G., 2nd Sept. 1914.

Monsieur le Maréchal,

I have the honour to thank you for the proposals that you have kindly made to the Government of the Republic relative to the co-operation of the British Army, which have been communicated to me.

In view of the events which have taken place during the past two days, I do not believe it possible actually to carry out a combined manœuvre on the Marne with all our forces. But I consider that the co-operation of the British Army in the defence of Paris is the only one which can produce advantageous results in the situation described in the attached letter which I am addressing to the Minister of War, of which I have the honour to send you a copy.

Please accept, Monsieur le Maréchal, the expression of my high consideration and of cordial sentiments of comradeship.

JOFFRE.

### II.

The General Commanding-in-Chief to the Minister of War.

G.Q.G., 2nd Sept. 1914.

I have received the proposals of Fd.-Marshal Sir J. French, which you kindly communicated to me; they suggest organizing a line of defences on the Marne which should be held by forces sufficiently dense in depth and particularly strong behind the left flank.

The actual position of the Fifth Army does not permit of the realization of the programme traced by the Fd.-Marshal and at the same time of assuring effective aid on the right of the British Army at the proper time.

On the other hand, the support of General Maunoury's Army, which is to move to the defence of the north-east fronts of Paris, is always assured on the left of the British Army; under these conditions the latter would be able to stand on the Marne for a certain time, then retire on the left bank of the Seine, which it should hold from Melun to Juvisy; thus the British forces would participate

[1] Translated from the G.H.Q. Records.

in the defence of the capital and their presence would greatly cheer the troops of the Entrenched Camp.

I may add that instructions have just been given to the Armies in order that their movements may be co-ordinated, and that it would not be advantageous to modify these instructions; they are intended to place our troops in a situation which will permit them to take the offensive in a very short time. The date of this movement will be communicated by Fd.-Marshal Sir J. French so as to allow the British Army to take part in the general offensive.

The General Commanding-in-Chief, JOFFRE.

III.

*Special Instruction No. 4.*

G.Q.G., 1st Sept. 1914.

(1) In spite of the tactical successes won by the Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies from the Meuse to Guise the outflanking movement against the left of the forces, insufficiently arrested by the British Army and the Sixth Army, constrains the forces as a whole to pivot on our right.

As soon as the Fifth Army has escaped the menace of envelopment, the Armies will resume the offensive.

(2) The withdrawal may lead the Armies to retire in a north-south direction. The Fifth Army must not on any account allow its left to be held fast. The other Armies will be able to oppose the enemy, the Army Commanders being careful not to uncover the neighbouring Armies and keeping in liaison.

(3) Lines of demarkation:

between the Fourth and Fifth Armies (Foch's Detachment); road Rheims—Epernay (Fourth); road Montmort—Romilly (Fifth);

between the Fourth and Third; road Grandpré—Sainte Ménehould—Revigny (to the Fourth Army).

In the zone allotted to the Fourth Army, Foch's Detachment will keep in liaison with the Fifth Army. The gap between Foch's Detachment and the Fourth Army will be watched by the 7th and 9th Cavalry Divisions (Fourth Army) supported by infantry detachments.

The moment that the Armies are in the following situations may be regarded as the limit of the retirement, without any implication that this limit must necessarily be reached:

Cavalry Corps (new formation),[1] south of Bray;

Fifth Army, behind the Seine, south of Nogent sur Seine;

Fourth Army (Foch's Detachment), behind the Aube, south of Arcis sur Aube;

Fourth Army (main body), behind the Ornain east of Vitry le François;

[1] Conneau's.

Third Army, north of Bar le Duc; it should then be reinforced by the Reserve divisions, which will leave the Hauts de Meuse to take part in the offensive movement.

If circumstances permit, portions of the First and Second Armies will be brought at an opportune moment to take part in the offensive. Finally the mobile troops of the Entrenched Camp of Paris may likewise be able to participate in the general action.

JOFFRE.

# ORIGINAL OF APPENDIX 24

(1)

G.Q. Général
des
Armées de l'est.

État-major.

3e Bureau.

No. 3332.

Au Grand Quartier Général,
le 2 septembre 1914.

Le Général Commandant en chef
à M. le Maréchal French,
commandant en chef les forces anglaises.

Monsieur le Maréchal,

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser mes remerciements pour les propositions que vous avez bien voulu soumettre au Gouvernement de la République, relatives à la coopération de l'armée anglaise, et qui m'ont été communiquées.

En raison des événements qui se sont passés depuis deux jours, je ne crois pas possible d'envisager actuellement une manœuvre d'ensemble sur la Marne avec la totalité de nos forces. Mais j'estime que la coopération de l'armée anglaise à la défense de Paris est la seule qui puisse donner un résultat avantageux dans les conditions exposées par la lettre ci-jointe que j'adresse à M. le Ministre de la Guerre et dont j'ai l'honneur de vous faire parvenir la copie.

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur le Maréchal, l'expression de ma haute considération et de mes sentiments de cordiale camaraderie.

JOFFRE.

(2)

G.Q. Général
des
Armées de l'est.

État-Major

3e Bureau.

No. 3331.

Au Grand Quartier Général,
le 2 septembre 1914.

Le Général Commandant en chef,
à M. le Ministre de la Guerre.

J'ai reçu les propositions du Maréchal French que vous avez bien voulu me communiquer ; elles tendent à organiser sur la Marne une

ligne de défense qui serait tenue par des effectifs suffisamment denses en profondeur et particulièrement renforcés derrière le flanc gauche.

Les emplacements actuels de la 5e armée ne permettent pas de réaliser le programme tracé par le Maréchal French et d'assurer à l'armée anglaise en temps voulu une aide efficace sur la droite.

Par contre, l'appui de l'armée du général Maunoury, qui doit se porter à la défense des fronts nord-est de Paris, est toujours assuré à l'armée anglaise sur la gauche ; celle-ci pourrait dans ces conditions tenir sur la Marne pendant quelque temps, puis se retirer sur la rive gauche de la Seine qu'elle tiendrait de Melun à Juvisy ; les forces anglaises participeraient ainsi à la défense de la capitale et leur présence serait pour les troupes du Camp retranché un précieux réconfort.

Je dois ajouter que des instructions [1] viennent d'être données aux armées en vue de coordonner leurs mouvements, et qu'il pourrait être désavantageux de modifier ces instructions ; elles tendent à placer nos troupes dans un dispositif leur permettant de prendre l'offensive dans un délai assez rapproché. La date de leur mouvement en sera communiqué au Maréchal French afin de permettre à l'armée anglaise de participer à l'offensive générale.

*Le Général Commandant en Chef,* JOFFRE.

(3)

L'ORDRE DE REPLI SUR LA RIVE GAUCHE DE LA SEINE

G.Q.G.
des
Armées de l'est.

État-Major.

3e Bureau.

*Instruction générale n° 4.*

1er septembre.

I.—Malgré les succès tactiques obtenus par les 3e, 4e, et 5e armées de la Meuse à Guise le mouvement débordant contre la gauche de l'armée, insuffisamment arrêté par l'armée anglaise et la 6e armée, oblige l'ensemble à pivoter autour de notre droite.

Dès que la 5e armée aura échappé à la menace d'enveloppement, les armées reprendront l'offensive.

II.—Le mouvement de repli peut amener les armées à se replier dans la direction N.-S. La 5e armée ne doit, en aucune façon, laisser saisir sa gauche. Les autres armées pourront faire face, les commandants d'armée ne découvrant pas les armées voisines et restant en liaison.

III.—Lignes séparant les zones de marche : entre la 4e et la 5e armée (détachement Foch) ; route Reims—Epernay (4e) ; route Montmort—Romilly (5e) ; entre la 4e et la 3e, route Grandpré—Sainte Ménehould—Revigny (à la 4e Armée). Dans la zone effectée à la 4e armée, le détachement Foch se tiendra en liaison avec la 5e armée. L'intervalle entre le détachement Foch et la 4e armée sera

[1] These are given in Instruction Générale No. 4 received by Sir John French late on the 2nd, "1914," pp. 101 and 103.

surveillé par les 7e et 9e divisions de cavalerie (4e armée), appuyées par des détachements d'infanterie.

On peut envisager comme *limite de mouvement* de recul, et sans que cette indication implique que cette limite doive forcément être atteinte, le moment où les armées seraient dans la situation suivante : le corps de cavalerie, formation nouvelle, au sud de Bray ; la 5e armée, en arrière de la Seine, au sud de Nogent sur Seine ; la 4e armée (détachement Foch) en arrière de l'Aube, au sud d'Arcis sur Aube ; la 4e armée (gros) en arrière de l'Ornain, à l'est de Vitry le François ; la 3e armée, au nord de Bar le Duc ; elle serait alors renforcée par les D.R. qui abandonneraient les Hauts de Meuse, pour participer au mouvement offensif.

Si les circonstances le permettent, des fractions des 1re et 2e armées seraient rappelées en temps opportun pour participer à l'offensive. *Enfin*, les troupes mobiles du camp retranché de Paris pourraient également prendre part à l'action générale.

JOFFRE.

*Secret.* O (*a*). Copy No. 7.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 14

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force.

G.H.Q., 2nd September 1914.

1. On the 1st September the 1st Cav. Bde. was in action at an early hour with the 4th German Cavalry Division, it was supported by units of the 3rd and 2nd British Corps, with the result that twelve German guns and a number of prisoners were captured.

The 2nd Division was engaged during the afternoon of the 1st September with the advanced guard of the 3rd German Corps, whose attack was checked and has not been pressed to-day.

An engagement has been taking place to-day between what is probably a German cavalry division, perhaps supported by the artillery of the leading division of the 2nd German Corps, posted about Montépilloy, and the French about Senlis. By the middle of the afternoon no infantry attack had been developed.

The 4th German Corps was this morning about Crépy en Valois and the 3rd German Corps about Villers Cottérêts.

2. The Army moves to-morrow to a position indicated personally by the C.-in-C. to Corps Commanders.

(*a*) 1st Corps using Trilport Bridge and bridges up stream, to move to ground about 2 miles south of Jouarre.

(*b*) 2nd Corps using Trilbardou, Isles les Villenoy and Meaux bridges, the latter being cleared by arrangement with the 1st Corps (Note: it is reported that Trilbardou bridge is only suitable for light transport), move to a position in the neighbourhood of Signy Signets—Vaucourtois inclusive.

(*c*) 3rd Corps by Lagny bridge to a position in the neighbourhood of Vaucourtois exclusive—Coutevroult.

(*d*) Cavalry Division by Lagny bridge, in rear of the 2nd and 3rd Corps to a position on the right of the 1st Corps.

3. The 3rd and 5th Cav. Bdes. remain under orders of I. Corps until the Cav. Div. has reached its position, when 3rd Cav. Bde. will come under orders of Cav. Div.

4. Corps Commanders will be responsible for the destruction of bridges over the Marne as follows :

1st Corps, Changis to Trilport both inclusive, and as far upstream as possible.
2nd Corps, Trilbardou inclusive, and all upstream thence to Trilport exclusive.
3rd Corps, Trilbardou exclusive, and all downstream thence to Lagny inclusive.

It is understood that preparations have been made by the French to destroy bridges between Isles les Villenoy inclusive and Lagny inclusive and that they have detachments posted at them for the purpose, but these detachments will act only on receipt of orders from British commanders.

5. Railheads for to-morrow :

1st Corps, 2nd Corps, 5th Cav. Bde. } Marles.

Cavalry Division, 3rd Corps . ., G.H.Q. . ., L. of C. Units ., Flying Corps . } Tournan.

6. Signal Offices established at Civil Post and Telegraph Offices at Meaux and at Lagny will remain open until ordered to close.

A Signal Office will be established at Mortcerf south of Crécy by 7 A.M.

Mortcerf will become the report centre for G.H.Q. from 7 A.M.

G.H.Q. will remain at Melun.

A. J. MURRAY, Lieut.-General,
C.G.S.

Issued at 7.30 P.M.

*Secret.* O (*a*). Copy No. 7.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 15

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commanding British Expeditionary Force

G.H.Q., 3rd September 1914.

1. The Army was not attacked during its movement to-day.

The enemy has been moving in an easterly and south-easterly direction during the day on Chateau Thierry where the left of the French was attacked this morning from which it retired to about Montfaucon.

The position of the German troops this afternoon was approximately as under :

(*a*) 1 corps (? IX.) about Chateau Thierry.
(*b*) 1 division (? III. Corps) at 2 P.M. in Marigny.
1 division (? III. Corps) at 2 P.M. at La Ferté Milon.
(*c*) 1 division (? IV. Corps) at 2 P.M. head about May en Multien.
1 division (? IV. Corps) not identified, but probably between Marigny and Mareuil.
(*d*) 1 division (? II. Corps) at 2 P.M. about Chèvreville.
1 division (? II. Corps) head about Nanteuil at 2.20 P.M. Cavalry at Dammartin at 2.20 P.M., St. Soupplets (two sqdns.) at 2.40 P.M. and between right flank of marching column and Marne.

There are indications that perhaps one additional corps (? VII.) may be advancing on Chateau Thierry from the N.N.W.

2. The Commander-in-Chief is most anxious to give the Army a complete day's rest to-morrow, but he feels very strongly the necessity for Army Corps Commanders to be ready to retire at short notice, the right of the Army being thrown back pivoting on its left and eventually resting along the left bank of the R. Seine.

3. All arrangements will be made for retirement as follows :

The movement will not commence without orders.

The general line to be reached by rear guards on the first day's march will be :

Mauperthuis (S.W. of Coulommiers) — Faremoutiers — Tigeaux —Chanteloup.

The roads allotted are as follows :

1st Corps. Signy Signets — Pierre Levée — La Haute Maison — Maisoncelles—Mortcerf—Marles—and all roads to the east.

2nd Corps. Quincy Ségy — St. Germain — Villiers sur Morin — Villeneuve le Comte—Tournan—and all roads between that and 1st Corps.

3rd Corps. Chanteloup—Ferrières—Pontcarré and all roads between that and 2nd Corps.

4. The 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades under Brig.-General H. Gough acting under instructions from 1st Army Corps will reconnoitre to the east and if possible gain touch with the French Cavalry starting early to-morrow. All information as to the enemy's movements to be transmitted to G.H.Q. as rapidly as possible.

5. The R.F.C. will as early as the light permits carry out reconnaissances in the direction of Chateau Thierry and to the north.

6. All bridges in front of the Army will be destroyed forthwith. See para. 4 of Operation Orders No. 14 (*d*) of 2nd September 1914.

7 Railheads :

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division | Verneuil. |
| 5th Cavalry Brigade | Mormant. |
| 1st Corps | Mormant. |
| 2nd Corps | Marles. |
| 3rd Corps | Chaumes. |
| Flying Corps | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| L. of C. units | do. |

Railhead for Ammunition, Villeneuve St. Georges (Goods Station) 10 miles S.E. of Paris.

8. Mortcerf will remain the report centre for G.H.Q.

G.H.Q. will remain at Melun.

HENRY WILSON,
Major-General,
Sub-Chief of the Staff.

Issued at 11.50 P.M.

# LETTER

OF

## GENERAL JOFFRE

TO

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR J. FRENCH

Grand Quartier Général
des
Armées de l'Est.

Au G.Q.G. le 4 septembre 1914.

État-Major.

3e Bureau.

Le Général Commandant en Chef,
au Field Maréchal Sir John French,
Commandant en Chef les Forces Britanniques.

Mon cher Maréchal,

Je viens de recevoir votre lettre du 3 septembre et je tiens à vous adresser mes remerciements pour les sentiments cordiaux qu'elle renferme. Ils m'ont vivement touché.

Mon intention, dans la situation actuelle, est de poursuivre l'exécution du Plan que j'ai eu l'honneur de vous communiquer et de n'engager le combat sur les lignes choisies, que toutes forces réunies.

Au cas où les Armées Allemandes poursuivraient leur mouvement vers le Sud-Sud-Est, s'éloignant ainsi de la Seine et Paris, peut-être estimerez-vous comme moi, que votre action pourrait s'exercer plus efficacement sur la rive droite de ce fleuve, entre Marne et Seine.

Votre gauche appuyée à la Marne, étayée par le Camp retranché de Paris, serait couverte par la garnison mobile de la capitale qui se portera à l'attaque dans la direction de l'Est par la rive gauche de la Marne.

J'ai l'honneur de vous confirmer la nouvelle que je vous avais annoncée hier de la nomination du Général Franchey d'Esperey, au Commandement de la 5e Armée. Je suis certain qu'il résultera de votre collaboration au combat les meilleurs résultats.

Croyez-moi, mon cher Maréchal, votre très sincèrement dévoué

J. JOFFRE.

# LETTER

OF

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH

TO

## EARL KITCHENER

Headquarters,
[Monday] 7th September 1914.

My dear Lord K.

Thank you for your letters of September 5th received late last night.

I am very sorry to seem to have allowed you to lack information in the previous two days, but, as I explained to you in my telegram, the situation and the arrangements for our advance were so uncertain on Saturday that I was afraid of misleading you. For instance, late on Friday night Joffre asked me to retire 12 miles in order to make room for his 5th Army south of the Marne. I had half completed the movement when he determined to keep the 5th Army north of the river and asked me to retrace my steps and get touch with that Army.

I think this was unavoidable, and on the whole his conception and his dispositions are really quite good. He tells me of the success in the advance of the 5th Army yesterday on my right and adds, "This result is certainly due to the advance of the English Forces "towards the East. The continuation of your offensive will be of "the greatest assistance to the attack of the 5th Army during the "movement to-morrow."

He asked me to direct the march to-day a little more to the north, so as to be in closer touch with the 6th Army on the left.

As regards this latter Army, they have in front of them the 4th German Reserve Corps which has retreated north of the Marne and which they appear to be hammering pretty freely.

The 2nd German Corps was moving north all yesterday and at nightfall was watched by the aeroplanes into a large forest just south of the Marne from which we supposed them to be debouching, through Lizy, north of the wood to the north of the river.

Joffre tells me that the 5th French Army have parts of the 9th and 3rd German Corps opposite them, and in rear of them are the 4th Regular Corps and parts of the 10th Corps.

As I told you, we pushed back considerable detachments of the enemy yesterday and hope to reach a much more forward line to-day.

I have been a great deal amongst the men and I find them in excellent spirits and good heart. Most of our casualties have now been replaced. I enclose you the returns for the 4th, 5th and 6th

September; they have, of course, gone officially through the Lines of Communication.

We are refitting as quickly as we can, having regard to the forward movement and to the awful congestion of trains in the rear. This is now getting better, but it will be some days before we get our full requirement and our maxims and guns.

I am delighted to hear about the Indian Divisions. Who is to be the Indian Corps Commander?

Thank you for all your trouble about the 6th Division. I have not worried you about it because I know very well you are doing all you possibly can, and I much hope to get a wire from you to-night or to-morrow morning to say it is coming.

. . . . . .[1]

You ask my opinion as to German fighting characteristics. I will write to you on this subject in a day or two, as I must get this letter off by the messenger; but I may say at once that it will never do to oppose them with anything but very highly trained troops led by the best officers. All their movements are marked by extraordinary unity of purpose and mutual support; and to undergo the fatigues they have suffered they must be under an absolutely iron discipline. However, more of this to-morrow. At the same time I will tell you what I think of Gwynn's very useful letter.

I return the Prime Minister's note.

I have tried to write a bit of my despatch on every day when I could spare a few minutes. I have got the story fairly complete and accurate in despatch form up to our retirement from St. Quentin on Friday the 28th. That is practically when we threw off the bulk of the enemy after our first fight on the Mons position.

This shall be finished off at once and will be with you in about three days; and it might be published on Thursday or Friday.

You say in your note enclosing P.M.'s letter,

"I only sent one man to write."

*No one* for writing purposes has arrived at the front. I should be delighted to have Percy.

Yours very truly,

J. D. P. French.

[1] Some personal remarks on a general have been omitted.

*Secret.*

# OPERATION ORDER No. 16

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force

G.H.Q., 4th September 1914.

1. Columns of the enemy, probable strength 3½ Corps and 4 Cavalry Divisions, have been marching all day across our front in a south-easterly direction, their left on Chateau Thierry, their right on La Ferté sous Jouarre. By noon the leading troops had begun to attack the XVIII. Corps of the 5th French Army at St. Barthélemy. The enemy's right flank guard, directed on Barcy, may be expected to cross the Marne to-night or to-morrow morning near Germigny.

2. The Army will move S.W. to-morrow—September 5th—pivoting on its left.

The general line to be reached by rear guards of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Corps will be :

Ormeaux (7 miles S.W. of Coulommiers)—Les Chapelles Bourbon —Ozoir la Ferrière.

*Roads Allotted :*

1st Corps. The road Pierre Levée—Gde. Loge Farm—Maisoncelles—La Celle—Mortcerf—La Houssaye—Fontenay and all roads east of this.

2nd Corps. The road Quincy Ségy—St. Germain—Villiers sur Morin—Villeneuve le Comte—Tournan—Coubert and all roads between this and 1st Corps.

3rd Corps. The road Chanteloup—Ferrières en Brie—Pontcarré—railway crossing 1½ miles east of Ozoir la Ferrière—Chevry—Brie Comte Robert and all roads between this and 2nd Corps.

The Cavalry Division (less 3rd and 5th Cav. Bdes. under 1st Corps) will move from Gournay by any roads west of those allotted to 3rd Corps to the area Brie Comte Robert (exclus.)—Limoges, consulting with 3rd Corps as to clearing Brie Comte Robert.

The Cavalry Division will be required to move S.E. early on the 6th so as to clear the eastern flank of the army.

3. Hours of starting will be arranged by Corps and Cav. Div. Commanders.

4. Railheads :

| | |
|---|---|
| 5th Cav. Bde. | Melun. |
| 1st Corps | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do |
| L. of C. | do. |
| R.F.C. | do. |
| 2nd Corps | Lieusaint. |
| 3rd Corps | do. |
| Cavalry Division | Bruncy. |

Ammunition railhead, Villeneuve St. Georges (Goods Station) about 10 miles S.E. of Paris.

5. Reports to Melun.

A. J. MURRAY, Lieut.-General,
C.G.S.

Issued at 6.35 P.M.

# LENGTH OF MARCHES[1]

(In miles)

| | I. Corps. | | II. Corps. | | III. Corps.[2] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1st Div. (1/Glouc. R.). | 2nd Div. (35th Heavy Batty. R.G.A.).[3] | 3rd Div. (From various War Diaries). | 5th Div. (From various War Diaries). | 19 Inf. Bde. (Brigade Diary). | 4 Div. (G.S. Diary). |
| *Advance* | | | | | | |
| August 20 | 8¾ | .. | 2 | .. | .. | .. |
| ,, 21 | 13 | .. | 21 | 15 | .. | .. |
| ,, 22 | 22½ | 20 | 17 | 15 | .. | .. |
| *Battle of Mons* | | | | | | |
| August 23 | .. | 22 | 5 | 3 | 7 | .. |
| *Retreat* | | | | | | |
| August 24 | 17 | 14 | 15 | 10 | 13 | .. |
| ,, 25 | 15½ | 24 | 25 | 24 | 19 | 6 |
| ,, 26 | 15 | 16 | 14 | 15 | 40 | 21[4] |
| ,, 27 | 23 | 15 | 17 | 23 | | 10 |
| ,, 28 | 21 | 20 | 27 | 20 | 17 | 20½ |
| ,, 29 | Rest day | 2 | 25 | 4 | Rest day | 12½ |
| ,, 30 | 10 | 23 | | 12 | 15 | 14 |
| ,, 31 | 18 | 12 | 15 | 15 | 19 | 15 |
| September 1 | 19 | 19 | 15 | 12 | 14 | 11½ |
| ,, 2 | 18½ | 21 | 13 | 14 | 13 | 9½ |
| ,, 3 | 16½ | 18 | 10 | 18 | 22 | 17½ |
| ,, 4 | 11½ | 8 | Rest day | Rest day | Rest day | Rest day |
| ,, 5 | 15 | 16[3] | 16[5] | 16[5] | 14[5] | 14[5] |
| | 244 | 250 | 237 | 216 | 193 | 151¼ |

[1] In many cases, on certain days, particular units greatly exceeded the distances given in the above table, which represent the bare minimum done on the roads.

[2] The IIIrd Corps, consisting of the 4th Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade, was only formed on 31 August.

[3] In this same period the battery fired 76 rounds.

[4] This includes both the retirement to the Le Cateau position in the early morning (8¾ miles) as well as the continuation of the Retreat after the conclusion of the action (12¼ miles).

[5] March carried out during night of 4/5 September.

*Note.*—It is hoped that some officers in the 3rd and 5th Divisions will be able to furnish a complete record of the marches carried out by their units between 20 August and 5 September 1914.

# GENERAL JOFFRE'S GENERAL ORDER FOR THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE[1]

## GENERAL ORDER

G.Q.G., 4th September 1914.

(1) The time has come to profit by the adventurous position of the German First Army and concentrate against that Army all the efforts of the Allied Armies of the extreme left.

All dispositions will be made during the 5th September for beginning the attack on the 6th.

(2) The following will be the positions to be attained by theevening of the 5th :

(*a*) All available forces of the Sixth Army north-east of Meaux, ready to cross the Ourcq between Lizy sur Ourcq and May en Multien in the general direction of Chateau Thierry.

The available portions of the I. Cavalry Corps which are at hand will be placed under the orders of General Maunoury for this operation.

(*b*) The British Army, established on the front Changis—Coulommiers, ready to attack in the general direction of Montmirail, the II. Cavalry Corps ensuring liaison between the British Army and the Fifth Army.

(*c*) The Fifth Army, closing slightly to the left, will be established on the general front Courtacon—Esternay—Sézanne, ready to attack in a general south-north direction.

(*d*) The Ninth Army (General Foch) will cover the right of the Fifth Army, holding the southern exits of the Marshes of St. Gond and sending a part of its forces on to the plateau north of Sézanne.

(3) These various Armies will take the offensive on the morning of the 6th September.

---

On the morning of the 5th September, the following orders were given to the group on the right formed by the Fourth and Third Armies :

FOURTH ARMY :

To-morrow, 6th September, the Armies of the left will attack the front and flank of the German First and Second Armies. The

[1] Hanotaux, vol. ix. p. 95.

Fourth Army, ceasing its movement towards the south, will turn and oppose the enemy, linking its movements with those of the Third Army, which, debouching north of Revigny, will take the offensive commencing towards the west.

THIRD ARMY :

The Third Army, covering itself from the north-east, will debouch towards the west in order to attack the left flank of the enemy forces which are advancing west of the Argonne. It will link its action with the Fourth Army which has been ordered to turn and oppose the enemy.

(No time of issue stated.)

# ORIGINAL OF APPENDIX 32

Au G.Q.G. le 4 septembre 1914.

1°. Il convient de profiter de la situation aventurée de la première armée allemande pour concentrer sur elle les efforts des armées alliées d'extrême gauche.

Toutes dispositions seront prises dans la journée du 5 septembre en vue de partir à l'attaque le 6.

2°. Le dispositif à réaliser pour le 5 septembre au soir sera :

(*a*) Toutes les forces disponibles de la 6e armée au nord-est de Meaux, prêtes à franchir l'Ourcq entre Lizy sur Ourcq et May en Multien, en direction générale de Chateau Thierry. Les éléments disponibles du 1er corps de cavalerie, qui sont à proximité, seront remis aux ordres du général Maunoury pour cette opération.

(*b*) L'armée anglaise, établie sur le front Changis—Coulommiers, face à l'Est, prête à attaquer en direction générale de Montmirail, le 2e corps de cavalerie assurant la liaison entre l'armée anglaise et la 5e armée.

(*c*) La 5e armée, reserrant légèrement sur sa gauche, s'établira sur le front général Courtacon — Esternay — Sézanne, prête à attaquer en direction générale sud-nord.

(*d*) La 9e armée (général Foch) couvrira la droite de la 5e armée en tenant les débouchées sud des marais de Saint Gond et en portant une partie de ses forces sur le plateau au nord de Sézanne :

3°. L'offensive sera prise par ces différentes armées le 6 septembre, dès le matin.

---

Le 5 septembre au matin, les ordres sont donnés au groupe de droite formé par les 4e et 3e armées :—

4e ARMÉE :

Le lendemain 6 septembre, nos armées de gauche attaqueront de front et de flanc les 1ère et 2e armées allemandes. La 4e armée, arrêtant son mouvement vers le sud, fera tête à l'ennemi, en liant son mouvement à celui de la 3e armée qui, débouchant au nord de Revigny, prend l'offensive en se partant vers l'ouest.

3e ARMÉE :

La 3e armée, se couvrant vers le nord-est, débouchera vers l'ouest pour attaquer le flanc gauche des forces ennemies qui marchent à l'ouest de l'Argonne. Elle liera son action à celle de la 4e armée qui a l'ordre de faire tête à l'ennemi.

Copy No. 7.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 17

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force

General Headquarters,
5th September 1914.

1. The enemy has apparently abandoned the idea of advancing on Paris and is contracting his front and moving south-eastward.

2. The Army will advance eastward with a view to attacking.
Its left will be covered by the 6th French Army also marching east, and its right will be linked to the 5th French Army marching north.

3. In pursuance of the above, the following moves will take place, the Army facing east on completion of the movement :

1st Corps { Right on La Chapelle Iger.
Left on Lumigny.
Movement to be completed by 9 A.M.

2nd Corps { Right on La Houssaye.
Left in neighbourhood of Villeneuve.
Movement to be completed by 10 A.M.

3rd Corps facing east in neighbourhood of Bailly.
Movement to be completed by 10 A.M.

Cavalry.

(1) Cavalry Division to guard the front and flank of 1st Corps on the line Jouy le Chatel (connecting with 5th French Army)—Coulommiers (connecting with 3rd & 5th Cavalry Brigades).

(2) 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades will cease to be under the orders of 1st Corps and will act in concert under instructions issued by Brigadier-General H. Gough. They will cover the 2nd Corps connecting with Cavalry Division on the right and with French 6th Army on the left.

Trains south of railway Nangis—Verneuil l'Etaing—Ozoir.

4. Roads allotted :—

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Corps. | Guignes—Chaumes—Fontenay—Marles—Lumigny inclusive and all roads to E. |
| 2nd Corps. | Coubert—Tournan—Villeneuve le Comte inclusive and all roads between this and 1st Corps. |
| 3rd Corps. | All roads W. of 2nd Corps. |

5. Railheads for 6th September 1914 :—

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division | Melun. |
| 5th Cavalry Brigade | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| L. of C. | do. |
| 1st Corps | Lieusaint. |
| 2nd Corps | do. |
| 3rd Corps | Brunoy. |
| R.F.C. | do. |
| Ammunition Railhead | Villeneuve St. Georges (Goods Station). |

6. G.H.Q. remains at Melun.

Reports centre G.H.Q., Tournan from 8 A.M.

A. J. MURRAY,
Lieut.-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

Issued at 5.15 P.M.

Copy No. 16.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 11

BY

## MAJOR-GENERAL E. H. H. ALLENBY, C.B.,
Commanding Cavalry Division

5th September 1914.

1. (*a*) The enemy has apparently abandoned the idea of advancing on Paris and is contracting his front and moving south-eastward.

   (*b*) The Army will advance eastwards to-morrow with a view to attacking. The right of our Ist Corps will be about La Chapelle Iger at 9 A.M.

2. The Cavalry Division will advance north-east. 1st bound, Gastins. Advanced guard, Pécy. Reconnaissances, Jouy le Chatel and Vaudoy. A special Officers' patrol detailed from the 2nd Brigade will accompany the former and get touch with the French Cavalry on our right. March table for the Division attached.

3. The Cavalry Field Ambulances & Ammunition Column will park at Mormant and be ready to move at 8 A.M. The Transport and spare horses will park between the road Mormant—Guignes, south-east of Pecquex, and be ready to move at 10 A.M.
   These formations will remain until they receive orders to move.

4. Units will parade as strong as possible, and leave as few spare horses as possible with the transport.

5. Reports to the *mairie* at Mormant till 8 A.M., after that hour to Gastins.

J. VAUGHAN,
Colonel, G.S.

Issued at 9.15 P.M.

## March Table

| Unit. | Starting Point. | Time. | Route. | Destination. | Notes. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2nd Bde. . . . . | T—roads at last E of La Fermete. | 6 A.M. | .. | about Beaulieu. | Advanced guard see para. 2. |
| R.H.A. 4th Bde. . . | | | | | |
| 1st Bde. . . . . | T—roads at last E of La Fermete. | 7 A.M. | Les Loges. | Gastins. | |
| Div. H.Q. . . . | T—roads at T of Mormant. | 6.30 A.M. | Les Loges. | Gastins. | Field Squadron will be accompanied by tool carts only. |
| 4th Bde. (less R.H.A.) . | | 6.40 A.M. | | | |
| Bde. R.F.A. . . . | | 6.55 A.M. | | | |
| Signal Squad'n . . | | 7.15 A.M. | | | Signal Squadron by necessary vehicles only. |
| Field Squad'n . . | | 7.20 A.M. | | | |

Copy No. 14.

# 1ST CORPS OPERATION ORDER No. 10

5th September 1914.

1. The proximity of the Allied and hostile forces is believed to be approximately as shown on the accompanying sketch map. [not reproduced.]

2. It is believed that the French Armies are going to take the offensive. The Expeditionary Force is to co-operate, and will to-morrow be disposed in the following positions with a view to attack.
The front allotted to the 1st Corps is from La Chapelle Iger to Lumigny.

3. The 2nd Corps will be in echelon behind our left with its right at La Houssaye.
The 3rd Corps will be in echelon behind the left of the 2nd Corps.
The Cavalry Division will cover the front and right flank of 1st Corps.
The 3rd & 5th Cavalry Brigades will cover the left flank.

4. The following moves will be completed by 9 A.M., at which hour the 1st Corps will be ready to advance; general direction Montmirail.
   (*a*) 1st Division front Courpalay to Rozoy, both inclusive, with one infantry brigade in reserve behind the right flank.
   (*b*) 2nd Division less one infantry brigade, 1 brigade R.F.A., & 1 troop Divisional Cavalry, Rozoy (exclusive) to Chateau de la Fortel (inclusive). One infantry brigade in echelon on the left flank.
   (*c*) Reserve—one infantry brigade, one brigade R.F.A., and troop Divisional Cavalry, 2nd Division, will be placed near Chaubuisson Farm under the orders of G.O.C., 1st Corps.
   (*d*) Army troops to Chaubuisson Farm.

5. *Trains* will be parked until movements of troops are completed. At 9 A.M. they will be moved south of the Nangis—Verneuil—Ozoir railway.

6. Reports to Chaubuisson Farm after 9 A.M.

J. E. GOUGH,
Brigadier-General,
S.G.S.O., 1st Army Corps.

Issued at 8.30 P.M.

Copy No. 6.

## 2ND ARMY CORPS

# OPERATION ORDER No. 15

2nd Army Corps Headquarters,
5th September 1914.

1. The advance of the enemy's main forces in a south-easterly direction continues. The right flank of this advance appears to be a column, variously estimated at a division and a corps, moving south-east from La Ferté sous Jouarre.

   No hostile forces had been reported in our immediate vicinity up to 4 P.M. to-day.

   The French forces to the north and east are taking the offensive.

2. The British Army will advance against the enemy to-morrow as follows :—

   (*a*) 1st Corps to line La Chapelle Iger—Lumigny.
   (*b*) 2nd Corps to line La Houssaye—Villeneuve.
   (*c*) 3rd Corps massed about Bailly.
   (*d*) Cavalry Division (less 3rd & 5th Brigades) to line Jouy le Chatel—Coulommiers. 3rd & 5th Brigades connecting with the Cavalry Division on the right and with French VI Army on the left, covering our 2nd Corps.

3. Heads of main bodies of Divisions of 2nd Corps will reach the line La Houssaye—Villeneuve by 10 A.M.—3rd Division starting at 6 A.M., 5th Division at 5 A.M.

   Corps Headquarters & Corps Troops to Tournan, starting at 9 A.M.

4. The following roads are allotted :

   *3rd Division—*

   (*a*) Châtres — Chau. des Boulayes — Champrose Fe. — La Houssaye.
   (*b*) Champrose Fe:—Pt. 120 ($\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of T of Bois de Fauvmet.
   (*c*) Any roads between (*a*) and (*b*).

   *5th Division—*

   (*d*) Tournan—Favières—Villeneuve.
   (*e*) Any roads between (*d*) and (*b*).

5. Divisions will find their own advanced guards ; 3rd Division in communication with 1st Corps, 5th Division with 3rd Corps.

6. On arrival, on the line given in paragraph 3, Divisions will bivouac in depth on the roads on which Divisional Columns have been marching, the actual roads being kept as clear as possible.

7. After arrival, the outpost line will be on the general line Crêvecœur (connecting with 1st Corps)—Obelisque—Croix de Tigeaux —L'Ermitage Fe.—Villeneuve St. Denis (connecting or communicating with 3rd Corps).
   Divisional mounted troops to observe during daylight northeast of the Forest to the line Mortcerf—Tigeaux—Romain Villers.

8. (*a*) Only ½ rations to be issued to units this evening—the other ½ being kept in Supply Sections of Trains, which are to be given the best horses.
   (*b*) Baggage Sections of Trains will remain in the Brigade areas when the troops march ; and, when roads are cleared, be parked at some central place in the rear of to-day's billeting area under orders issued by Divisional Commanders.
   Subsequent orders will be issued by Corps H.Q.
   (*c*) The head of the Ammunition Park will be at the road junction just north of the last S in Presles at 10 A.M.
   (*d*) Railhead for supplies—Lieusaint.
   Railhead for ammunition—Villeneuve St. Georges.
   (*e*) Rendezvous for Supply Columns—Lissy, at 3 P.M.

9. Reports to Chau. Villepateur up to 9 A.M., and after that hour to Chau. Combreux (¾ mile south of Tournan).

G. F. WALKER,
Brigadier-General,
General Staff,
2nd Army Corps.

Issued at 7 P.M.

Copy No. 11.

# 3RD CORPS OPERATION ORDER No. 7

Ref. Paris—Meaux—Melun & Provins Sheets, 1·26 miles to 1 inch (1/80,000)

Brie Comte Robert
5th September 1914.

1. The bulk of the German forces which have been following the British troops in their retirement has moved south-east against the left of the French 5th Army about St. Barthelemy.

   The British Force is about to assume the offensive to the north-east against the German right flank, in conjunction with the 6th French Army.

2. The 3rd Corps will advance to-morrow towards Serris, acting in conjunction with the 2nd Corps on its right.

3. Starting Point—Railway crossing $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Ozoir la Ferrière.

   Time—5 A.M.

   Route—Pontcarré—Ferrières—Jossigny—Serris.

   The 4th Division will furnish the advanced guard consisting of 1 Infantry Brigade and attached troops.

   On reaching Ferrières a left flank guard of 2 battalions and 1 battery will be provided by the 4th Division.

   The 19th Infantry Brigade will follow the 4th Division.

4. Trains are to be parked in the vicinity of Ozoir la Ferrière by 11 A.M.

5. Railhead for supplies to-morrow, 6th September, Brunoy.

   Rendezvous for Ammunition Parks to-morrow, 6th September, Brie Comte Robert at 10 A.M.

6. The Commander 19th Infantry Brigade will detail half a battalion to proceed to Ozoir la Ferrière to provide for the security of the train, and half a battalion to proceed to Brie Comte Robert to provide for the security of the Ammunition Parks.

7. Report centre—Brie Comte Robert up to 6 A.M., after that hour Ferrières.

J. P. DU CANE,
Br.-General,
General Staff.

Issued at 7.45 P.M.

# SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.M.G., Commander-in-Chief, British Army in the Field.

6th September 1914.

After a most trying series of operations, mostly in retirement, which have been rendered necessary by the general strategic plan of the Allied Armies, the British forces stand to-day formed in line with their French comrades, ready to attack the enemy.

Foiled in their attempt to invest Paris, the Germans have been driven to move in an easterly and south-easterly direction, with the apparent intention of falling in strength on the V French Army. In this operation they are exposing their right flank and their line of communication to an attack from the combined VI French Army and the British forces.

I call upon the British Army in France to now show the enemy its power, and to push on vigorously to the attack beside the VI French Army. I am sure I shall not call upon them in vain, but that, on the contrary, by another manifestation of the magnificent spirit which they have shown in the past fortnight, they will fall on the enemy's flank with all their strength and in unison with their Allies drive them back.

J. D. P. FRENCH, Field-Marshal,
Commander-in-Chief, British Army in the Field.

(From a copy among the G.S. papers of the III Corps.)

O (a)
*Secret.*

Copy No. 13.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 18

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commanding British Expeditionary Force

G.H.Q., 7th September 1914.

1. During to-day the enemy's forces in our front have been retreating towards the north all along the line.

On our right the French 5th Army are pursuing the German corps to the line of the Petit Morin, after inflicting severe losses upon them, especially about Montceaux which was carried at the point of the bayonet.

In our front, the enemy's retreat has been covered by his 2nd and 9th Cavalry Divisions who have suffered severely.

On our left flank two hostile corps, that were withdrawing northwards across the Marne, have been heavily attacked by the French 6th Army on the line of the Ourcq.

2. The intention of the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief is to continue the pursuit in the direction of the Marne, with the right of the Army on Nogent, attacking the enemy wherever met.

3. Roads are allotted as follows :—

*1st Corps.* The road St. Remy—Rebais (eastern road)—La Trétoire—Boitron—La Noue—Pavant—Charly to Breuil—Sablonnières—Hondevilliers—Nogent l'Artaud road, inclusive. Roads east of this will be used by the French.

*2nd Corps.* The road Boissy le Châtel—Doue—St. Cyr—Saacy and all between this and 1st Corps.

*3rd Corps.* Will march on Jouarre, using roads west of 2nd Corps.

Heads of columns will cross the line St. Remy—Boissy le Châtel—La Haute Maison at 6 A.M.

The Cavalry Division and 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades will continue the pursuit, keeping touch on the right with the Corps of Cavalry of the 5th French Army, and on the left with the 6th French Army.

4. Supply railheads for 8th September 1914 :—

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division | Chaumes. |
| 5th Cavalry Brigade | do. |
| 1st Corps | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| L. of C. Units | do. |
| Royal Flying Corps | do. |
| 2nd Corps | Marles. |
| 3rd Corps | Tournan. |
| Ammunition Railhead | Verneuil. |

5. Reports to Melun.

HENRY WILSON, for
Lieut.-General, C.G.S.

Issued at 9 to 10 P.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 13.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 19

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commanding British Expeditionary Force

General Headquarters, 8th Sept. 1914.

1. The enemy are continuing their retreat northwards and our Army has been successfully engaged during the day with their rear guards on the Petit Morin, thereby materially assisting the progress of the French Armies on our right and left, which the enemy have been making great efforts to oppose.

2. The Army will continue the advance north to-morrow at 5 A.M., attacking rear guards of the enemy wherever met.

The Cavalry Division will act in close association with the 1st Corps and gain touch with the 5th French Army on the right.

General Gough, with the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades, will act in close association with the 2nd Corps and gain touch with the 6th French Army on the left.

3. Roads are allotted as follows :—

*1st Corps.* Eastern road—Sablonnières—Hondevilliers—Nogent l'Artaud—Saulchery—eastern side of Charly—Le Thiolet.

Western road—Le Trétoire—Boitron—Pavant—western side of Charly—Villiers sur Marne—Domptin—Coupru, both inclusive.

*2nd Corps.* Western road—St. Ouen—Saacy—Méry—Montreuil inclusive, and all roads between this and western road of 1st Corps exclusive.

*3rd Corps.* Western road—La Ferté sous Jouarre—Dhuisy inclusive, and all roads between this and western road of 2nd Corps exclusive.

4. Supply railheads for 9th September 1914 :—

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division | Chaumes. |
| Brig.-Gen. Gough's Command | Chaumes. |
| 1st Corps | Coulommiers. |
| 2nd Corps | do. |
| 3rd Corps | Mortcerf. |
| L. of C. | Chaumes. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| R.F.C. | do. |
| Ammunition Railhead | Verneuil. |

5. Reports to Melun till 9 A.M., after that hour to Coulommiers.

A. J. MURRAY, Lt.-Gen.,
Chief of the General Staff.

Issued at 7.30 P.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 13.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 20

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force

General Headquarters, 9th Sept. 1914.

1. The Army to-day forced the passage of the Marne. The 1st and 2nd Corps have reached the line Le Thiolet—Montreuil. 3rd Corps, opposed by the enemy's Guard and 2nd Cavalry Divisions, holds the north bank of the river at La Ferté.

During the pursuit the enemy suffered heavy loss in killed and wounded; some hundreds of prisoners have fallen into our hands and a battery of eight machine guns was captured by 2nd Division.

The 6th French Army has been heavily engaged to-day along the line Crégy—Marcilly—Puisieux—Bouillancy—Betz, and has successfully resisted all attacks.

The left of the 5th French Army was expected to reach Chateau Thierry this evening.

2. The Army will continue the pursuit northwards to-morrow at 5 A.M. and attack the enemy wherever met.

3. The 3rd Corps will bridge the Marne during the night so that the corps may be in a position to cross at 5 A.M., and march on Cocherel, maintaining touch with the French Cavalry Brigade on its left.

The Cavalry Division will act in close association with 1st Corps and gain touch with 5th French Army on the right.

General Gough, with 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades, will act in close association with 2nd Corps and keep touch between 2nd and 3rd Corps.

4. *Roads allotted*:

*1st Corps.* Eastern road. Le Thiolet—Lucy le Bocage—Torcy—Priez—Neuilly St. Front.

Western road. Coupru—Marigny en Orxois—Bussiares—Hautevesnes—St. Gengoulph—Monnes—Passy en Valois—Noroy sur Ourcq, both roads inclusive.

*2nd Corps.* Western Road. Montreuil—Dhuisy—Germigny sous Colombs—Brumetz—St. Quentin—La Ferté Milon, inclusive, and all roads between this and western road of 1st Corps, exclusive.

*3rd Corps.* Roads west of those allotted to 2nd Corps.

The Cav. Div. Transport and Supply Columns will use the eastern road allotted to the 1st Corps.

The 2nd Corps will arrange with General Gough regarding the road to be used by the transport of the 3rd and 5th Brigades.

5. Supply Railheads for 10/9/14 :

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division | Jouy sur Morin. |
| 1st Corps | St. Siméon. |
| 2nd Corps | Chailly Boissy. |
| Gen. Gough's Command | Coulommiers. |
| 3rd Corps | do. |
| L. of C. | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| R.F.C. | do. |
| Ammunition Railhead | Verneuil. |

6. Reports to Coulommiers.

HENRY WILSON, for
Lieut.-General, C.G.S.

Issued at 8.15 P.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 15.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 21

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force

General Headquarters, 10th September 1914.

1. During the advance to-day the 1st and 2nd Corps have been opposed by strong rear guards of all arms, and assisted by the Cavalry Division on the right, 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades on the left, have driven the enemy northwards. Seven guns, many machine guns, well over 1,000 prisoners, and much transport have fallen into our hands. The enemy left many dead on the field.

2. The Army will continue the pursuit in a north-easterly direction to-morrow at 5 A.M., and crossing the Ourcq will reach the line Bruyères—Cugny—St. Remy—La Loge Ferme (north of Chouy).

The Cavalry Division and General Gough's Command will carry out the same rôle as to-day.

3. Roads will be allotted as follows:

*1st Corps.* Eastern road. Monthiers — Grisolles — Rocourt St. Martin—Fère en Tardenois (inclusive).

Western road. Priez — Latilly — Oulchy le Chateau—Beugneux (inclusive).

The road Dammard—Neuilly St. Front and all roads to the west will be cleared by the 1st Corps by 8 A.M.

*2nd Corps.* Western road. Passy en Valois — Montron —Neuilly St. Front—Vichel Vanteuil—Billy sur Ourcq —St. Rémy—Hartennes (inclusive), and all roads between this and the western road of the 1st Corps.

*3rd Corps.* Roads between western road of 2nd Corps (exclusive) and the road La Ferté Milon—Troesnes—Longpont (exclusive), the latter being used by the French 6th Army.

The 3rd Corps will arrange with the 2nd Corps

for the use of the road Brumetz—Chézy en Orxois —Passy en Valois—Chouy, which will be cleared by the 2nd Corps as early as possible.

4. The Cavalry Division transport and supply columns will use the eastern road allotted to the 1st Corps.

The 2nd Corps will arrange with General Gough regarding the road to be used by the transport of the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Bdes.

5. Railheads for September 11th will be the same as for to-day.

6. Reports to Coulommiers.

A. J. Murray, Lieut.-Gen., C.G.S.

Issued at 8.15 p.m.

*Secret.* Copy No. 17.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 22

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force

General Headquarters, 11th September 1914.

1. The 1st German Army appears to be in full retreat north and east before our advance.

2. The Army will continue the pursuit to-morrow. Every endeavour will be made by the Cavalry, in co-operation with the French Cavalry on the right and left, to harass the retreating enemy.

3. Heads of corps will cross the road Saponay—Grand Rozoy—St. Rémy—Louatre at 6 A.M.

4. The crossings over the Aisne will be seized, and the columns will reach the high ground overlooking the river.

5. Roads will be allotted as follows:

*I. Corps.* Eastern road. Rocourt—Fère en Tardenois—Loupeigne—Bazoches—Longueval—Bourg (inclusive).
Western road. Latilly—Oulchy le Chateau—Arcy Ste. Restitue—Jouaignes—Courcelles—Pont Arcy (inclus.).

*II. Corps.* Western road. Billy sur Ourcq—St. Rémy—Hartennes—Chacrise—Serches—Vailly (inclusive), and all roads between this and western road of I. Corps exclusive.

*III. Corps.* Western Road. Chouy—La Loge Fe.—Villers Hélon—Septmonts—Venizel—Bucy le Long (inclusive), and all roads between this and the western road of II. Corps (exclus.).

6. The Cavalry Division transport and supply columns will use the eastern road allotted to the 1st Corps.

The 2nd Corps will arrange with General Gough regarding the road to be used by the transport of the 3rd and 5th Cav. Bdes.

Cavalry Supply columns will have precedence over those allotted to corps.

7. All supply railheads for 12th September will be the same as for the 11th September.

An advanced ammunition depot has been formed near Nogent l'Artaud where corps Ammunition Parks can replenish.

8. Reports to Coulommiers till 2 P.M., after that hour to Fère en Tardenois.

A. J. MURRAY, Lieut.-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

Issued at 6 P.M.

# GENERAL JOFFRE'S INSTRUCTION OF 12TH SEPTEMBER 1914[1]

## SPECIAL INSTRUCTION No. 23

G.Q.G., 12th Sept. 1914.

The enemy has been forced to retreat before the front of the Ninth and Fourth Armies; if the enemy continues to give way before our Armies of the left and the British Army the following dispositions will be made after the passage of the Aisne:

In order to outflank the enemy by the west, the Sixth Army leaving a strong detachment in the west of the Saint Gobain forest[2] to ensure liaison, in all circumstances, with the British Army, will send the bulk of its forces to the right bank of the Oise.

The British Forces should be directed northward; in order to facilitate their passage through the wooded hill region south-west of Laon, the zone included between the road Soissons—Coucy le Chateau—Saint Gobain—La Fère (inclusive) and the road Longueval—Bourg and Comin—Chamouille—Bruyères—Athies (inclusive) is placed at their disposal.

The Fifth Army, likewise maintaining close liaison by a detachment with the right of the British forces, will cross the Aisne with its left as soon as possible so as to be astride of that river.

No modification has been made in Special Instruction No. 22, as far as the other Armies are concerned.

The General Commanding in Chief
(sd.) J. JOFFRE.

True copy
The Major General
F. BELIN.

[1] Translated from the copy in the G.H.Q. Records.

[2] "dans le massif de Saint Gobain" is corrected in MS. to "dans l'ouest du massif de Saint Gobain."

*Secret.* Copy No. 17.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 23

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commanding British Expeditionary Force

General Headquarters,
12th September 1914.

1. The enemy continued retreating to-day. There was some opposition south of Soissons and on the line of the Vesle.
The Army is halted to-night in close touch with the French 6th Army on our left and 5th Army on our right.

2. The Army will continue the pursuit to-morrow at seven A.M.

3. Heads of Corps will reach the line Lierval—Chavignon—Terny.

4. Roads allotted :

*1st Corps :*

Eastern road. Longueval — Bourg — Chamouille — Bruyères—Athies (inclusive).

Western road. Braine — Presles (2 miles south-east of Vailly)—Chavonne—Lierval—Presles (2 miles south-west of Bruyères)—Laon (inclusive).

*2nd Corps :*

Western road. Chacrise—Missy sur Aisne—Vregny—Pont Rouge — Bascule — Pinon — Anizy le Chateau — Suzy (inclusive) and all roads between this and the western road of the 1st Corps (exclusive).

*3rd Corps :*

Courmelles — Soissons — Terny — Coucy le Chateau — St. Gobain (inclusive) and all roads between this and western road of 2nd Corps (exclusive).

5. The Cavalry Division will use the eastern road allotted to the 1st Corps.
The 2nd Corps will arrange with General Gough as to the allotment of roads for transport of the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades. Cavalry transport will have precedence over that of corps.

6. Supply columns will fill up on the 13th from Reserve Parks as follows :

| | |
|---|---|
| Cavalry Division<br>1st Corps<br>R.F.C.<br>L. of C. Units | Main road between Fère en Tardenois and Coincy. |
| Genl. Gough's Command<br>2nd Corps | Main road between Latilly and Neuilly St. Front. |
| 3rd Corps | Main road between Monnes & La Ferté Milon, at a point about south-west of Passy. |

Ammunition Parks replenish at Nogent l'Artaud and all empty lorries of the Parks should be sent there to replenish as early as can be arranged.

7. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

A. J. Murray,
Lieutenant General,
Chief of the General Staff.

Issued at 7.45 p.m.

*Secret.* Copy No. 17.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 24

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commanding British Expeditionary Force

General Headquarters,
13th September 1914.

1. The Army has succeeded in obtaining a footing on the North side of the Aisne in face of considerable opposition by strong rear guards of the enemy's 3rd Corps supported by one or two cavalry divisions.

   The 5th and 6th French Armies have also succeeded in crossing on our right and left respectively, working in close touch with us.

2. The Army will continue the pursuit to-morrow at 6 A.M., and act vigorously against the retreating enemy.

3. Heads of corps will reach the line Laon—Suzy—Fresne.

4. Roads allotted :

   *1st Corps.*

   Eastern road. Bourg—Chamouille—Bruyères—Athies inclusive.

   Western road. Presles — Chavonne — Lierval — Laon inclusive.

   *2nd Corps.*

   Western road. Missy sur Aisne—Pont Rouge—Pinon—Anizy le Chateau—Suzy inclusive, and all roads between this and western road of 1st Corps.

   *3rd Corps.*

   Western road. Venizel—Bucy le Long—Crouy—Braye—Clamecy—Terny—Coucy le Chateau—St. Gobain inclusive, and all roads between this and western road of 2nd Corps.

5. The Cavalry Division will advance in the general direction Courtecon—Laon.
   Communication must be maintained with 1st Corps.

General Gough's Command in the general direction Allemant—Wissignicourt.
Communication must be maintained with 2nd Corps.
Every effort must be made to harass the enemy's retreat.

6. Arrangements will be made between 1st Corps and Cavalry Division and between 2nd Corps and General Gough's Command, with regard to cavalry billets and roads to be used by cavalry transport and supply columns, which in all cases will have precedence over transport allotted to corps.

7. Supply railheads for 14th September will be :

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Cavalry Division . . | Fère en Tardenois. |
| 1st Corps . . . . | do. |
| G.H.Q. . . . . | do. |
| R.F.C. . . . . | do. |
| L. of C. Units . . . | do. |
| General Gough's Command . | Oulchy—Breny. |
| 2nd Corps . . . . | do. |
| 3rd Corps . . . . | Neuilly St. Front. |

Ammunition Parks will continue to replenish at Nogent l'Artaud.

8. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

A. J. Murray,
Lieutenant General,
Chief of the General Staff.

Issued at 6 p.m.

*Secret.* Copy No. 33.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 25

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field

General Headquarters, 14th September 1914.

1. The situation as far as known along the whole line from left to right is as follows :

*6th French Army.* The 6th French Army is engaged along the right bank of the Aisne from Soissons to Attichy. On the extreme left the 4th Corps was marching with its left on Nampcel this afternoon.

*3rd Corps :* The 3rd Corps holds the spurs north-west and north-east of Bucy le Long having been closely engaged with the enemy all day.

*2nd Corps :* The 5th Division is on the line south of S[illegible] of Chivres—Ste. Marguerite to-night where it has been engaged during the day.

The 3rd Division holds a position from the railway bridge south-east of Vailly—north of Vailly—knoll west of Vailly. It has been heavily engaged all day.

*1st Corps :* The 1st Corps advanced this morning from Bourg supported by the Cavalry Division on its right ; the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Division was attacked near Cerny, but drove off the enemy and captured twelve guns ; several hundred prisoners were also taken.

During the day both 1st and 2nd Divisions successfully drove off the hostile counter attacks and in the afternoon the 2nd Division was holding the plateau south of Ostel supported by the 4th Cavalry Brigade on its left and the 2nd Cavalry Brigade on its right.

*5th French Army.* On the right of the 1st Corps the 18th French Corps was heavily attacked at Craonnelle and has been ordered to maintain itself in its present position.

On the right of the 18th Corps the group of Reserve Divisions is at Berry au Bac, and with the 3rd Corps on its right holds the line of the canal through Loivre to La Neuvillette near Reims. The 1st Corps occupies Reims. The 10th Corps is on its right.

At 4.30 P.M. the French 5th Army (less the 18th Corps) were ordered to take the offensive along the whole front.

2. The Army will operate to-morrow according to instructions issued personally by the Commander-in-Chief to G.O.C. Corps and Cavalry Divisions.

3. Supply railheads for the 15th September will be :

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Cavalry Division . . | Fère en Tardenois. |
| 1st Corps . . . . | do. |
| G.H.Q. . . . . | do. |
| R.F.C. . . . . | do. |
| L. of C. Units . . . | do. |
| General Gough's Command . | Oulchy—Breny. |
| 2nd Corps . . . . | do. |
| 3rd Corps . . . . | Neuilly St. Front. |

Ammunition Parks will continue to replenish at Nogent l'Artaud.

4. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

HENRY WILSON, for
Lieut.-Gen., Chief of the General Staff.

Issued at .[1]

[1] The II. Corps copy of this order is endorsed "rec[d] 9.15 P.M."

*Secret.* Copy No. 17.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 26

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field

General Headquarters,
15th September 1914.

1. On the right of the British Army the French have made some progress.

The 18th Corps has occupied Craonne and the high ground on the left and is in touch with the right of our 1st Corps.

On the left the French have reached the general line Soissons—Noyon and are making progress on their left.

Our Army has successfully maintained its position and has repulsed numerous counter-attacks inflicting severe loss on the enemy.

The 6th Division has to-day reached Rocourt and is marching early to-morrow morning to join 3rd Corps.

2. The Commander-in-Chief wishes the line now held by the Army to be strongly entrenched, and it is his intention to assume a general offensive at the first opportunity.

3. Supply Railheads for the 16th September will be :

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Cavalry Division | Fère en Tardenois. |
| 1st Corps | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| R.F.C. | do. |
| L. of C. Units | do. |
| General Gough's Command | Oulchy—Breny. |
| 2nd Corps | do. |
| 3rd Corps | Neuilly St. Front. |
| Ammunition Railhead | Fère en Tardenois Rly. Station. |

4. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

A. J. MURRAY, Lieut.-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

Issued at 8.30 P.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 18.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 27

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field

General Headquarters, 16th September 1914.

1. The enemy in our front appears to be holding approximately the same position as yesterday, but in some cases has withdrawn guns to positions further North. Six batteries are also reported to have moved east along the Chemin des Dames north-east of Aizy.

The 5th French Army on our right has maintained its position and on our left the 6th French Army has continued a vigorous offensive, the result of which is not yet known.

2. The intention of the Commander-in-Chief is that the Army should continue to hold its present line which should be strengthened by every available means, and that a general offensive should be resumed on the first opportunity.

3. The 6th Division is placed in General Reserve at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief. The Artillery of this Division now in action will not, however, be withdrawn without further orders from the Commander-in-Chief.

4. Supply Railheads for the 17th September 1914 will be :

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Cavalry Division | Fère en Tardenois. |
| 1st Corps | do. |
| G.H.Q. | do. |
| R.F.C. | do. |
| L. of C. Units | do. |
| 2nd Cavalry Division | Oulchy—Breny. |
| 2nd Corps | do. |
| 3rd Corps | Neuilly St. Front. |
| Ammunition Railhead | Fère en Tardenois Railway Station. |

5. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

HENRY WILSON,
Major-General,
Sub-Chief of the Staff.

Issued at 8.30 P.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 18.

# OPERATION ORDER No. 28

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field

General Headquarters, 1st October 1914.

1. Reports indicate the continued movement of troops from in front of the 5th and 6th French and the British Armies to the north and north-west.

2. It is the Commander-in-Chief's intention to withdraw the 2nd Corps from the defensive line and concentrate it in rear.

3. The following changes in the disposition of the Army will take place under cover of darkness this evening and will be carried out as rapidly as possible subject to tactical considerations. The movements will be completed by daylight on October 3rd.

4. The defensive line *now allotted to the 3rd Division* will be taken over *by the 1st Corps* with the 16th Infantry Brigade attached.

The 1st Cavalry Division will be in reserve to 1st Corps.

The defensive line now occupied by the 5th Division will be taken over by the 3rd Corps less the 16th and 17th Infantry Brigades of the 6th Division (see para. 8).

The 19th Infantry Brigade will remain for the present in reserve under the 3rd Corps, but will not be used for duty in the trenches.

The 17th Infantry Brigade will be in general reserve.

5. To enable this readjustment to be carried out:

The 17th and 18th Infantry Brigades and 38th Field Co. R.E. will be relieved in the trenches by troops of 1st Corps and will be concentrated at a place to be selected by 1st Corps.

The position of the 17th Infantry Brigade will be notified to General Headquarters and that of the 18th Infantry Brigade to 3rd Corps.

The 18th Infantry Brigade will be moved from there under orders of 3rd Corps.

The 17th Infantry Brigade will remain in general reserve.

The 9th Infantry Brigade and 12th Field Co. R.E., will be withdrawn from the trenches at Vailly and relieved by troops of the 1st Corps.

Arrangements for taking over the artillery positions of 2nd Corps will be arranged between 2nd Corps and 1st and 3rd Corps respectively.

The artillery of the 6th Division will be moved under orders of 3rd Corps.

The XXXII. Field Artillery Brigade will come under orders of 3rd Corps.

The artillery of the 2nd Corps will be concentrated under corps arrangements.

The 6-inch howitzers and Fortress Companies R.E. will remain in their present positions and will come under the command of the corps responsible for the areas in which they are situated.

The 3rd Corps will arrange with 2nd Corps to hand over sufficient pontoon equipment from 2nd Bridging Train to complete the bridging establishment of the Field Companies of the 5th Division. The Field Companies of the 3rd Division will be completed from the half bridging train allotted to 2nd Corps; the remainder of this train will come under the orders of 1st Corps.

6. As soon as relieved the 2nd Corps will concentrate in the area Cuiry Housse—Nampteuil sous Muret—Muret—Droizy—Oulchy le Chateau—Cramaille—Arcy Ste. Restitue, disposed with a view to marching on Compiègne by the Vierzy—Vivières—Pierrefonds—Compiègne road inclusive and roads to south.

7. The order in which the foregoing moves will be carried out generally will be as follows:

(*a*) Relief of trenches.
(*b*) Concentration of infantry of 2nd Corps.
(*c*) Readjustment of artillery and reserve troops.

8. The 3rd Corps from this date will consist of the 4th and 6th Divisions with the 19th Infantry Brigade temporarily attached.

9. Railheads for supplies and ammunition remain unchanged.

10. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

A. J. Murray,
Lieut.-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

G.H.Q.,
3 P.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 18.

# ARMY OPERATION ORDER No. 29

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field

General Headquarters, 2nd October 1914.

1. The 2nd Cavalry Division will move in accordance with attached march table via Amiens and St. Pol to Lille.

2. The II. Corps will move in accordance with attached march table to the area Longueil Ste. Marie—Pont Ste. Maxence and will commence entraining there on October 5th.
Paragraph 6 of Operation Order No. 28 is modified accordingly.

3. *Roads allotted :*

*2nd Cavalry Division.* Hartennes—Long Pont—Bonneuil—La Croix St. Ouen—Montdidier—Amiens—St. Pol—Bethune inclusive, and roads south or west.

*2nd Corps.* Serches—Hartennes—Long Pont—Villers Cottérêts—Bonneuil—La Croix St. Ouen—Longueil Ste. Marie inclusive and roads to south.

4. The first two marches at least will be carried out by night. Great care must be taken to conceal the troops and columns of transport during the day.

5. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

A. J. MURRAY,
Lieut.-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

G.H.Q., 11 A.M.

[TABLE

## March Table

FOR MOVEMENT OF

2ND CAVALRY DIVISION AND II. CORPS

| Date. | 2nd Cav. Div. Head of Column. | II. Corps. Heads of Columns to reach the approximate line. |
|---|---|---|
| Oct. 1st/2nd | Hartennes. | Oulchy le Chateau—Serches. |
| ,, 2nd/3rd | Fleury—Troesnes. | Troesnes—Long Pont. |
| ,, 3rd/4th | Verberie. | Crépy en Valois—Béthancourt. |
| ,, 4th/5th | Le Ployron. | Pont Ste. Maxence—Longueil. |
| ,, 5th/6th | Thennes. | Begins entraining on 5th. |
| ,, 6th/7th | Villers Bocage. | |
| ,, 7th/8th | Frevent. | |
| ,, 8th/9th | Houdain. | |
| ,, 9th/10th | La Bassée. | |
| ,, 10th/11th | Lille. | |

*Secret.* Copy No. 18.

# ARMY OPERATION ORDER No. 30

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,

Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field

General Headquarters, 4th October 1914.

1. The 1st Cavalry Division will move via Amiens and St. Pol to the neighbourhood of Lille. Move to commence this evening and the first two marches to be carried out under cover of darkness or fog. Great care must be taken to conceal the troops and columns of transport during the day.

2. Roads allotted: Hartennes — Longpont — Bonneuil — La Croix St. Ouen—Montdidier—Amiens—St. Pol—Bethune inclusive and roads south or west.

3. *Table of Marches:*

| Date. | Heads of Columns to reach the Approximate Line. |
|---|---|
| 4th/5th . . . . . | Longpont—St. Rémy. |
| 5th/6th . . . . . | Morienval—Crépy en Valois. |
| 6th/7th . . . . . | Hémévillers—Estrées St. Denis. |
| 7th/ . . . . . | La Neuville Sire Bernard. |
| 8th/ . . . . . | Villers Bocage. |
| 9th/ . . . . . | Nuncq. |
| 10th/11th . . . . . | Bethune. |
| 11th/12th . . . . . | Lille. |

4. Railheads will be notified later.

5. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

A. J. MURRAY,
Lieut.-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

G.H.Q.,
8 A.M.

*Secret.* Copy No. 18.

# ARMY OPERATION ORDER No. 31

BY

## FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B., ETC.,
## Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field

General Headquarters, 5th October 1914.

1. The 19th Infantry Brigade will move in accordance with the following march table to the area Longueil Ste. Marie—Pont Ste. Maxence, and will commence entraining there on October 8th at an hour to be notified later.

The move will commence this evening, and the first two marches will be carried out under cover of darkness. Great care must be taken to conceal the troops and columns of transport during the day.

2. Roads allotted:
Septmonts—Villers Cottérêts—Béthancourt—Verberie—Pont Ste. Maxence.

3. Table of marches:

| Date. | Head of Column to reach. |
|---|---|
| 5th/6th . . . | Villers Cottérêts. |
| 6th/7th . . . | Béthancourt. |
| 7th/8th . . . | Longueil Ste. Marie—Pont Ste. Maxence. |

4. The 19th Infantry Brigade will cease to be under 3rd Corps from the commencement of the movement.

5. Reports to Fère en Tardenois.

A. J. MURRAY, Lieut.-General,
C.G.S.

Issued at 8.30 A.M.

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